

**Gen Ed Task Force Retreat Agenda
August 17, 2006
Campbell Library, East Grand Forks**

- 8:30-8:45 Breakfast
- 8:45-9:00 Inauguration of New Co-Chairs
Report from Common Experience Group
Report from Quantitative Reasoning Group
Report from Decisions Making Group
- 10:15-10:30 Break
- 10:30-10:45 Introduce Gen Ed Models Brainstorming Activity and Demo
- 10:45-12:15 Group Work
- 12:15-12:45 Lunch (groups eat together, catered from Blue Moose)
- 12:45-1:45 Group Presentations (15 minutes each)
- 1:45-2:30 Discussion and Decisions on how to Proceed
- 2:30-2:45 Break
- 2:45-4:00 Discussion and Decisions continued

A. North Dakota State Board of Higher Education General Education Requirement

The following general education requirement must be met by all University System institutions. The requirement is to be met by lower division courses. University System institutions may establish program and institution specific general education requirements in addition to the state requirement.

Communications - 9

Arts & Humanities - 6

Social Sciences - 6

Mathematics, Science & Technology - 9

Institutional Specific - 6

Total – 36

B. Task Force Consensus of UND General Education Goals

Goals to be included in new General Education Program:

- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Cultural Understanding (many universities require 2 diversity courses split into “world” and “U.S.”. Others have specifications such as “non-western culture”, “global awareness”, etc.)
- Breadth (this can either be a direct goal or subsumed within the Gen Ed program)

Goals to still consider:

- Quantitative Reasoning

C. List of Gen Ed models/structural elements used by other universities

The following is a summary of the report from the two Task Force sub-committees who invested General Education programs at peer universities, North Dakota state universities, and “best” Gen Ed university programs.

Presented here is a list of models and program structures that other universities use to frame their general education programs. These are listed in no particular order of importance or effectiveness. Many universities combine different structural elements into an overall General Education plan.

1. College Approach: General Education program is located within the college, rather than the university level.
2. First Year Seminars or First Year Experience Courses: generally only for 1-2 credits. An example course title is “Freshman Inquiry”. Could address topics such as information literacy skills, etc.
3. Senior capstone: either as a course for the major or sometimes as a university-wide course outside the department.
4. Core Curriculum: Examples include U of Nevada-Reno’s 9-credit “core humanities” curriculum and Fairleigh Dickinson’s 12 credit University Core (the global exchange, perspectives on the individual, cross-cultural perspectives, and the American experience). Other universities with core curriculums include Washington State and Southern Illinois University.
5. Thematic clusters: usually a 6-9 credit sequence of “thematic” courses outside the department or major.
6. Integrated Studies: Students complete 6-9 credits of integrated studies courses that integrate distribution requirements.
7. Vertical Structure: Some Gen Ed courses must be taken beyond the sophomore year. Examples include: upper-level writing courses, upper-level diversity courses, 3-6 gen ed credits taken after 60 hours have been completed, etc.
8. Writing-Intensive courses: integrated with a Gen Ed course or a course required for the major.
9. Embedded courses: a general education requirement is embedded into a course, such as the diversity requirement being satisfied by an Indian Studies course, critical thinking being more specifically embedded in courses, etc.
10. Specific required courses: Requiring certain gen ed courses such as a history course, a wellness course, an ethics course, a quantitative reasoning course, etc.

D. Prominent Issues to Keep in Mind

This list has been combined from the General Education Longitudinal Study, Departmental Scans, Findings of the GER Committee, Transcript Analysis Project, etc.

Meaningful: Many students do not find the current General Education program meaningful to their university studies.

Visible: The new General Education program needs to be much more visible for students and faculty.

Breadth: We all agree that breadth is important. But should the goal be simply acquiring a breadth of knowledge, or should it be the students' ability to integrate different knowledge bases to solve problems, reach conclusions, etc.

Depth: Many students feel they best acquire general education knowledge when it is integrated in their upper division major courses.

Best Practices: Research in General Education supports that Gen Ed programs include elements of both breadth and depth. The weakest type of program is the Distribution Model.

Assessment: General Education goals and outcomes need to be assessable and provide direct evidence of outcomes.

Communication goal: Faculty complain about the writing ability of UND students in upper level division courses. Can this issue be addressed in a new Gen Ed program?

World Cultures Goal: The goal of “developing some familiarity with cultures other than your own” appears to be weak in that students overall take fewer classes for this goal than any other. Several other concerns with the current goal as well.

General Education Breadth Requirement: Concept #1 (Integrated model)

What is Essential Studies at the University of North Dakota?

UND requires its undergraduates to take a number of Essential Studies courses out of the deep conviction that living a successful and satisfying life demands a breadth of knowledge and a wide range of intellectual skills. Whatever your area of specialization or career plan, this knowledge and these skills will enable you to establish a basis for life-long learning as a person, a professional, and a member of the larger community.

The courses offered in the ES curriculum provide broad and diverse perspectives on how human beings think and feel, solve problems, express ideas, and create and discover new knowledge. These courses also help you acquire the skills essential to university-level learning: they challenge you to think critically, communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and increase your understanding of the role of culture in a diverse world.

What are the defining features of Essential Studies courses?

Although Essential Studies courses vary considerably in both content and format, they are all designed with some common purposes in mind. First, regardless of content, each ES course will address at least one breadth goal appropriate for the discipline. Second, each ES course will address at least one of the three/four skills goals. Finally, each ES course will be designed to keep you actively engaged in your own learning. This means that, whether your class is large or small, whether it is a general introduction to the discipline or a closer look at a special topic, you will have opportunities to ask questions and participate in discussion, facilitated, where appropriate, by innovative teaching and learning technologies.

General Education Breadth Requirement: Concept #2 (Distribution model)

UND requires its undergraduates to take a number of Essential Studies courses out of the deep conviction that living a successful and satisfying life demands a **breadth of knowledge and a wide range of intellectual skills**. Whatever your area of specialization or career plan, **this knowledge and these skills** will enable you to establish a basis for life-long learning as a person, a professional, and a member of the larger community.

The courses offered in the ES curriculum provide **broad and diverse perspectives** on how human beings think and feel, solve problems, express ideas, and create and discover new knowledge. Simultaneously, these courses help you acquire essential **intellectual skills**: they challenge you to think critically, communicate effectively both orally and in writing, and increase your ability to engage with different cultural perspectives in a diverse world.

I. Breadth of Knowledge in Essential Studies

One of the marks of a well-educated person is a breadth of knowledge. The ability to draw on a variety of fields of knowledge is not only important for professionals in any field; it is crucial for understanding ourselves, our communities, and the larger world.

Committed to providing students with a breadth of knowledge in a variety of subject areas, UND's Essential Studies program requires you to complete a distribution requirement that introduces you to academic fields within Humanities/Fine Arts, Social Sciences, and Science/Math/Technology [[click here for distribution requirements and for course choices](#)].

Taking courses across a wide-range of subject-areas will expose you to the ways that people think and create knowledge in a variety of disciplines. Giving you the opportunity to try out what it means to think like an artist or art critic, like a social scientist, or like a scientist, your Essential Studies courses demonstrate why the Humanities/Fine Arts, Social Sciences, and Science/Math/Technology are important to society.

When you choose your Essential Studies courses, venture into areas that are new, interesting, or arouse your curiosity. By choosing courses that range outside your current experience, you will gain opportunities to explore questions and issues that can cause you to grow and expand your knowledge and awareness.

Also consider choosing ES courses that complement each other, so that you can extend what you learn in individual courses. By linking courses in this way, you can develop the ability to make connections between them and draw on their ideas and traditions to address the complex, multi-faceted questions of life in the 21st century.

Notes on Decision-Making Process for Gen Ed Task Force

The guiding philosophy behind this process is that we as a Task Force must achieve a workable consensus among ourselves if we are to present our recommendations to the campus with any hope of having them accepted. To that end, we do not feel that a simple majority - even less a plurality - is sufficient for any important decision we might make. Thus, we recommend that when matters do need to come to a vote (always a paper ballot - even for non-binding straw polls) we must achieve a 2/3s approval for any matter to be accepted. The reason that we are recommending that all votes, even non-binding straw polls, be made by paper ballot is to ensure that everyone feels free to vote his/her position as fully as possible, as well as to open doors for future discussion (in the case of straw polls) and to strengthen the ultimate consensus (in the case of binding votes).

While it is of crucial importance that we have this process in place for our Retreat of August 17 - where we will be deciding on the general package of goals we are recommending - it is our intention that this process will be used for every subsequent decision of the Task Force. We will also want to apply this process to some of the "features" being discussed in our group work at the retreat.

Typically we will proceed as follows: for any issue for which we have had background reading and group discussions (ie whether or not we should include a certain goal) we will start off with a straw poll indicating those in favour, those opposed, and those not certain. The purpose here is to get a sense of where the Task Force members stand on the issue. From here discussion will ensue, facilitated by the Co-Chairs, who will also be noting key points of debate on a flip-chart. If it is clear from the discussion that the group is moving towards a consensus the Co-Chairs will call for a ballot. Ideally, we will be at the 2/3s mark and be able to move on to other matters. Given the camaraderie which has developed among the Task Force members we believe that even those who end up having supported the minority position will feel that their voices and perspectives were valued in this entire process. The reality is, however, that the time has come to move forward, which means that we must have some decisions made and "cast-in-stone" as we move into phase two of our work.

We will modify this system somewhat for occasions when we have a multitude of options before us. For example, as we consider the various "features" that we wish to incorporate within our agreed upon goals, we will adapt a rank-order process - eliminating those proposals which have the least support from the "Ballot" until we have winnowed the field to the most widely accepted set of features we wish to incorporate into our program of Gen Ed.

Because there is a general sense on the Task Force that Gen Ed reform must be an ongoing process we can also use our decision-making process to help set plans for the future. For example, if after agreeing on a certain number and type of goals, we find ourselves very much attracted to the idea of including yet another goal - or implementing an approach which would call for even more change in implementation than we think the

campus is ready for at the present, we can make a decision to have this set as a future goal or a future feature for implementation.