

TO: All Faculty Interested in Gen Ed at UND
FROM: Departmental Audit Subcommittee, UND General Education Task Force
DATE: April 19, 2006
RE: Summary of 2005/2006 Results to Date

This packet contains several items that are the result of most of a year's worth of work by the UND General Education Task Force. The first two attachments relate specifically to the work of the Departmental Audit Subcommittee, namely to poll departments across the campus on their attitudes and opinions about where Gen Ed is now at UND and where it should be going. The first attachment is an attempt at a summary of the main points that came out of those visits and the second attachment is a table of the raw data somewhat arbitrarily broken down across academic/professional lines as well as those departments that teach a lot of Gen Ed courses (providers) and those that have high enrollments in their department (consumers).

In addition to the Departmental Audit Subcommittee, subcommittees were formed to look at what we know about our current Gen Ed Program and how it works, to identify the characteristics of some of the 'best' Gen Ed programs across the country (including peer institutions), and to draft a potential set of revised goals for the Gen Ed program at UND. Based on the work of the subcommittees and discussions among Task Force members to date, several points of consensus have solidified and these are summarized in the third attachment.

Despite strong agreement on some points, however, there are several important areas that are still under active debate and which have support on both sides. These include:

- 1) Should a common experience such as a capstone project be mandated for all programs at UND?
- 2) Should one goal of Gen Ed be for all students to achieve quantitative literacy?
- 3) How does the concept of breadth fit into Gen Ed? Is it simply allowing students the option to take a variety of classes or should students be required to take a number of disparate courses with the goal of exposing them to/developing an appreciation of different intelligences?
- 4) Should Gen Ed be explicitly spread throughout the curriculum by incorporating upper division coursework?
- 5) Should a Gen Ed class 'feel' different from a class for majors (teaching style, class size, etc.)?
- 6) Should an administrative position be dedicated (at least partially) to the oversight of the Gen Ed program?
- 7) How can we balance the need to assess our program goals with the already heavy expectations of faculty time?

We would welcome your comments on any of the information in the packet but specifically on the items listed above and on the potential list of goals (the fourth attachment). In addition, if your department would like the Departmental Audit Subcommittee to attend a future meeting to discuss these items in person, please contact Matt Cavalli at matthewcavalli@mail.und.nodak.edu or 7-4389.

Attachments:

Summary of Departmental Audit Subcommittee
Departmental Audit Subcommittee Raw Responses
Gen Ed Points of Consensus
Potential Revised Mission Statement and Goals for UND Gen Ed

Summary of Departmental Audit Subcommittee
February 15, 2006

Departments Visited to Date: 13 (12 + SEM)

A wide range of responses were gathered by the subcommittee on topics ranging from how departments feel the current Gen Ed program serves their students to what they see as the purpose of Gen Ed to what changes they would suggest. The purpose of this summary is to call out common themes and highlight surprising/innovative (at least for us) suggestions. Several comments reoccurred throughout the audit process, both from those departments identified as ‘producers’ of Gen Ed (teach courses with Gen Ed credit with high enrollments) and ‘consumers’ of Gen Ed (have high numbers of students in the program):

Many departments expressed a view that one purpose of Gen Ed is to provide a breadth of knowledge across many disciplines. As a follow up to that, they felt Gen Ed courses should lay educational foundations across all disciplines. Many also felt that Gen Ed is not/should not be limited to the first two years. Courses within the major taught at the upper level address some, if not all, of the current Gen Ed goals. Perhaps there should be an explicit integration of the Gen Ed program across all four years. Regardless of the level of the class, the view was expressed that the Gen Ed goals to be achieved should be explicitly communicated by the instructor to the students (preferably by including them in the syllabus and then discussing them in class).

General Education should be the basis for integration/synthesis between disciplines. As such, classes should be developed and goals should be written with different intelligences/learning styles in mind to facilitate integration/synthesis.

Information literacy/computer literacy should be integrated into the Gen Ed goals.

A high level of frustration was expressed due to the perception that students lack certain skills when they get to their upper division courses, skills that instructors at that level typically assume they will have. Writing and critical thinking, in particular, were called out. The perception was expressed that students are, in general, less prepared to enter college today than in the past and that there is only so much that can be done to catch them up.

Large class sizes in Gen Ed courses were also a concern, especially with regards to constraints on teaching methods and the limitations on student learning (e.g. how to integrate communication exercises into large classes).

Other themes were expressed somewhat less frequently but were suggested independently or supported by several departments across campus. Due to the sample size, methods, etc. it is difficult to judge whether these issues are generally more or less important across the entire campus than those in the preceding section:

The purpose of a Gen Ed program is to produce educated citizens. As a result, some content is, by its very nature, important to Gen Ed (this was expressed by not only by departments with a vested interest in certain subjects but also professional programs and unrelated departments).

Proposed examples of fundamental knowledge areas were History, Psychology, Economics and the scientific method.

General Education requirements should be as real to the students and faculty as programmatic requirements.

Is it possible to institute a writing entrance exam similar to that used in Math? The concern is not a student's composition skills, but knowledge of spelling, grammar, etc. Students who did not achieve a certain proficiency would be required to take a remedial writing skills course that would not count towards graduation.

Also related to the writing issue, some departments pointed out that writing in the discipline is not like writing composition papers. A suggestion of courses like, "Technical Writing in Business," was made. Another very interesting suggestion was to compile examples/standards of writing from disciplines across UND into a single booklet that could either be sold at the bookstore or provided to students. A similar suggestion was made for an undergraduate research handbook geared towards critical thinking, synthesis, etc.

A successfully Gen Ed program requires strong advising. Advisors must see the program as more than hurdles to overcome to get to the classes that count. More importantly, they must convey that to their students and do so in language that makes sense to the students (e.g. make informed choices in the mind of the professor translated in one instance into shop better in the minds of the students). One way of doing this would be to list the specific goals each Gen Ed course meets in the catalogue, not just the overall category (Social Science, Arts and Humanities, etc.). The current method of requiring categories (counting courses) and hoping goals get satisfied does not work.

More interaction between faculty teaching Gen Ed courses is needed, not only with other Gen Ed faculty but also with faculty from the disciplines whose students take their courses. Certain courses are required by disciplines for their content but are also classified as Gen Ed. How can the rigor of the content be preserved while making it accessible to students accustomed to other ways of thinking?

Assessment of classes may be possible after the first two years, but assessment of the Gen Ed goals should wait until the end of their time at UND (or later). Alumni surveys and employer feedback could be part of the program evaluation. Concern was expressed, however, that the push for assessment makes some instructors feel like 'assessors' and not 'teachers'. Pushing them too far may simply result in their withdrawing their classes from the Gen Ed program.

A large open question raised across the campus was how to instill the desire to succeed in our students.

Success of Gen Ed, whether under the current system or under a revised version, requires support at the highest levels of the administration.

There were also several issues which seemed to have support on both sides:

Gen Ed should consist of a few core courses/common readings/etc. A common Gen Ed core would be too burdensome on a campus our size.

Shorten the list of courses or else promote clear paths from 'best courses' in each department. Keep the long list of courses to allow choice.

Capstone/folios are excellent ways to evaluate students. Don't mandate capstones/folios – too resource intensive.

Goals are good as they are but implementation is bad. Goals are too skills oriented, need to be contextualized. Current goals serve the students as well as they want to be served. Keep goals vague to give departments latitude.

Gen Eds should maintain rigor of knowledge as foundation for students in related disciplines.

Gen Eds should focus on educational/learning skills that will allow the knowledge to be integrated later. Some Gen Ed courses should target proficiency in certain skills and others should target competency in certain areas of knowledge.

Departmental Audit Subcommittee Raw Responses

In the following table, P = Professional Degree Program (Nursing, Engineering, Aviation, Social Work, Physical Therapy); A = Academic Program

Comment	Consumer	Producer
Some departments designate the majority of Gen Ed courses to be taken	P1	
Many courses could fit into one or more of Gen Ed categories (Math/Sci, etc.)	P1	A1
Do students self-select into a few Gen Ed courses or do advisors/departments push them?	P1	
Need emphasis on skills but some specific content like History is important	P1	A3
Responsibility/Maturity goal as part of Gen Ed?	P1	
How do we instill the desire to excel?	P1	A1
Should 300/400 level courses be explicitly identified as extensions of Gen Ed (interdisciplinary)	P2, A2	A3
It doesn't seem that students have met goals 1-3 when they get to upper division classes	P1	
Gen Ed Program assessment must be done at Jr/Sr level to be meaningful (class assessment may be useful at sophomore level)		A2
Need higher writing standards (communication, not just creative writing)	P3, A3	A4
Writing entrance exam for UND?	P2	A1
Need ability to write compositions and technical papers	P2, A1	A1
Information literacy goal in Gen Ed?	P1, A1	A1
Gen Ed goals should be explicitly stated on syllabus along with how the class will meet them	P2, A1	A1
Make Gen Ed requirements as real as programmatic requirements	P2	A1
Should feedback from employers be incorporated into Gen Ed program?	P1	
For some majors, how do we know where the students go to work?		A1
Hands-on/active learning/laboratory components allow faculty to really emphasize Gen Ed goals	A1, P1	A1
Push for assessment makes teachers 'assessors' not teachers		A1
Examinations are tailored to evaluate accreditation goals as well as Gen Ed goals		A1
Variety of available courses is good and allows students to tailor their education		A1
Context specific courses are good – a few core courses would be burdensome on a few faculty/departments and would be full all the time		A1
Assessing Gen Ed goals in large class sections is burdensome to faculty and may not yield useful data		A1
Too much assessment may simply cause departments to pull out of Gen Ed if their courses are required of majors and may not affect enrollment		A1
Purpose of Gen Ed is to give a common experience to all students	A1	

Should be an educational foundation across all disciplines	A2, P1	A1
Gen Ed allows exploration	A2, P2	A4
Gen Ed allows integration of disciplines/synthesis	A1, P1	A1
Gen Ed connects education with society to answer question, “How does this fit into the world?”	A1	
The ordering of the goals is important	A1	
Making informed choices is most important goal	A1	
Being informed and making choices are two different goals	A1	
The distribution system and goals do not come together well	A1	
Goals are too ‘skills oriented’ – need to be contextualized	A1	
Current goals as stated ‘open doors’ for students	A1, P2	
Our current goals serve the students as well as they want to be served	A1, P2	
Our Gen Ed program is very generic, nothing unique to UND	A1	
Our Gen Ed program lacks focus – the Gen Ed program should bring the campus together in a common language but it does not	A1	
Need a goal to address ethics	A1	
Good to have some Gen Eds more closely linked to the discipline (Writing for the Humanities, etc.)	A1	
All students taking a Gen Ed course could be required to read a common text – focal point of campus with outside speaker, etc.	A1	
Need some broader Gen Eds such as Legal Education for the General Citizen, etc.	A1	
Students need to see Gen Ed as an opportunity to learn, not something thrust on them (stimulate students)	A1	A1
Gen Ed program should lead the way in synthesis across disciplines	A1	A1
Information from Gen Ed courses comes up in discussions		A1
Intro Gen Ed course focuses on Informed Choices goal		A1
Learning the scientific method is important		A2
Other cultures/international goals hit in context of outsourcing		A1
Easier to tell if student has had math than if they have had previous communication course		A1
Teamwork should be a goal	P1	A1
Shorten the list of courses or suggest clear paths through them – focus on ‘best candidates’ within each department		A1
Keep long list	P1	A1
Keep cafeteria style to promote choice	P1	A2
Don’t make capstone – too resource intensive		A1
Make it clear and easy for students to check if they have fulfilled Gen Ed requirements		A1
Students can’t read, write or speak		A2
Keep Gen Ed in the first two years		A1
Many students expect easy A’s in Gen Eds		A1
Too many departments offer too many Gen Eds – approval seems political		A1
Conflict between important information for majors in Gen Ed courses		A1

and addressing Gen Ed goals		
Attendance is an issue in Gen Ed courses – should be mandatory?		A1
Goals are good but implementation is bad		A1
Large class size in Gen Eds is an issue	P1	A4
Need more focus on world cultures (but also flexibility)	P2	
Need to incorporate better advising to make Gen Ed successful	P2	A1
Don't add credit hours	P1	
More outcome-based assessment is needed – develop a quantifiable set of skills	P1	
Study abroad as a part of Gen Ed for world cultures	P1	
A regular roundtable of faculty teaching Gen Eds should be held	P1	A1
Gen Ed should be integrated throughout the curriculum of each department and faculty should be more aware of the program	P1	
More interdisciplinary courses should be developed that are targeted to help those outside a major/way of thinking integrate new ideas	P1	
Should be focused on skills, not content at Gen Ed level	A1	
Students seem to be lacking certain skills we inherently expect them to have when they arrive – an issue for K-12 as well – those that already have the skills do well, if not, they don't	A1	A1
Seems like the actual content of Gen Ed courses doesn't jive with name/description (students don't have the implied skills later)	A1	
Need a course specifically on critical thinking	A1	
Do Gen Ed faculty see themselves as such, i.e. do they consider the skills the students will need in various disciplines or just their own?	A1	
Too much peer assessment in some courses – need to lay a good foundation of skills in Gen Ed so peers have a basis for good assessment later	A1	
Develop a UND Writing Style Guide (also Research Handbook) with sections from each discipline	A2	A1
Bring together Gen Ed faculty and disciplines to decide on structure/content of Gen Ed courses	A1	
Plagiarism is a problem		A1
Computer literacy should be a goal		A1
Goals need clarification		A1
Validation is designed to weed out classes		A1
Better communication between departments and GER committee is needed		A2
Add additional classifications outside the traditional Soc. Sci, A&H, etc.		A1
Need to acknowledge different learning styles/intelligences in goals		A1
Is a validation process necessary?		A1
Faculty Gen Ed important, students disagree	P2	A1
Need a required grammar, mechanics course (in lieu of Comp 101?)	P1	
Important to keep the rigor (content) in Gen Ed courses for majors	P1, A1	A1
Students don't actually reach Gen Ed goals until they get their Doctorate	P1	
Gen Ed should produce education citizens – what should an educated	A1	A2

Gen Ed Points of Consensus

- 1) We need much higher visibility for Gen Ed program - on-line, in catalog, UND web page - and in the minds of faculty and students. This is not simply a matter of better publicity, it must be part of an institutional commitment to Gen Ed. However, this commitment could be part of UND's "marketing" approach as the "Liberal Arts" institution within the region.
- 2) We need a strong statement of philosophy and rationale – i.e. a strong preamble for whatever program and set of goals we finally agree upon.
- 3) All classes which are deemed to be Gen Ed must make the particular goals which are sought after clear both in writing (the syllabus) and verbally in class. (This may be thought of as underlining the "intentionality" of each Gen Ed offering.)
- 4) At UND Gen Ed is the foundation upon which all of our diverse educational missions are built. As such there must be a strong and obvious set of correlations drawn between our Gen Ed goals, our University Mission statement and all Strategic Plans etc. etc. - anything which goes into the public domain. This correlation - or integration - will allow us to link and assess our Gen Ed program across a student's full career at UND. In effect, we must seek "alignment" of all UND and Gen Ed goals.
- 5) Following the KISS principle, and after having listened to many different groups, it seems that the following student learning outcomes are the most desirable for UND:
 - a) the ability of our students to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing
 - b) the ability of our students to think critically and creatively
 - c) the ability of our students to understand and appreciate cultures different from their ownIn attempting to help our students meet learning outcomes (a), (b), and (c) above, UND will almost certainly be exposing its students to what is usually referred to as the "distribution" or "breadth" requirement - which has considerable support across campus. We may wish to approach this issue by advocating synthesis or integration of our core goals.

Potential Revised Mission Statement and Goals for UND Gen Ed

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 of the common goals of the Essential Studies Program (see below). As a student, you will be asked to think seriously about these goals and to help assess the extent to which the course has addressed them. Second, 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.

What is the best way to select Essential Studies courses?

When you choose your Essential Studies courses, we encourage you to 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.

UND also encourages you to choose 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

Goals of Undergraduate Education At the University of North Dakota

Goal #1: Breadth of Knowledge and Understanding

Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of basic knowledge, ideas, and concepts in a range of subject areas, representing the humanities/fine arts, social sciences, and science/math/technology.

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

Example indicators: Written or oral assignments and tests that ask you to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the basic concepts of a discipline.
- Demonstrate familiarity with the important texts and ideas associated with a discipline
- Analyze information, conduct research, and make presentations in a manner appropriate to the discipline.
- Draw on and integrate information, concepts, and ideas from different disciplines to address issues of importance in the contemporary world.

Goal #2: Critical Thinking

Students will be able to analyze ideas, information, and quantitative data carefully and logically, and to draw sound conclusions or make reasonable judgments based on that analysis. {Note: This version includes Quantitative Reasoning in Critical Thinking. If we choose to make Quantitative Reasoning a separate category, it can be separated out with its own rationale and example indicators.]

Rationale: The ability to make informed choices and decisions based on evidence and careful reasoning is one of the hallmarks of an educated person. In this category, we include both quantitative and qualitative reasoning.

Example indicators: Written or oral assignments or exams that require you to:

- analyze complex texts, issues, or problems, presented in either quantitative or qualitative form
- synthesize information, arguments, or quantitative data in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions;
- evaluate the logic, validity, and relevance of data and arguments;
- propose resolutions to problems and questions by considering alternatives and broader implications

Goal #3: Communication

Students will be able to express ideas and convey information to others effectively in a variety of written and spoken formats.

Rationale: The ability to communicate clearly and effectively is a skill that is needed not only on the job but in personal and civic life.

Example indicators: Written or oral assignments or exams that require you to:

- make effective presentations orally, either individually or as part of a group
- present information clearly and effectively in written form
- make persuasive arguments, either orally or in writing

Goal #4: Cultural understanding

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the ways culture affects perspective in a multicultural world, and use that understanding to address issues, solve problems, and shape personal and professional behavior

Rationale: Because the United States is becoming a much more diverse society, and because we are living and working in a multicultural world, it is vitally important that we develop an understanding of and appreciation for cultures different from our own. This understanding is crucial not only in the world of work, but in our role as citizens of a global society.

Example indicators: Written or oral assignments and/or tests that ask you to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the concept of culture and its significance for understanding behavior or addressing problems
- demonstrate sensitivity to cultural differences when dealing with other students, community members, or potential employers/employees
- demonstrate an understanding of their own culture as seen from the perspective of others