

## **Music Department's Comments on the General Education Working Draft**

We recognize that the members of the General Education Task Force have worked very hard and committed much of their own time to this project. We are also grateful to Dr. Kelsch and Dr. Kenville for coming to the Music Department so that we could discuss our concerns. As requested at that meeting, we have prepared this memo to formally document our concerns.

The lack of definition in the goal areas set out in the general education task force's working draft make it extremely difficult, if not impossible to comment on the "model" of general education it espouses. Whereas our current goals do speak to the arts (i.e., "understand how conclusions are reached in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities") and artistic processes (i.e., "think critically and creatively"), the current working draft makes absolutely no reference to the arts or artistic processes. We find this absence of great concern. Beyond that, the goal areas that have been identified in the working document do not seem to parallel one another; communication (writing and speaking in English?), one of the six areas of the state distribution requirement has been designated as a goal area along with critical thinking (a broad mode of inquiry spanning all disciplines?), quantitative reasoning (critical thinking in a numerical context?), information literacy (a tool to enable critical thinking?), ethics (values that we share?) and diversity (ways of thinking and doing in multiple contexts?).

One of the campus-wide concerns with our present general education system (as confirmed in the Bush Longitudinal Study) is that students perceive it as a series of requirements to "get out of the way." The ND State Board of Higher Education's distribution requirement mandates that students become acquainted with the broad domains of knowledge that are generally accepted components of an educated person's world view. Without goals that articulate the value of these domains, students are likely to continue to see them as items to be checked off in their pursuit of a major and a degree. If this is to be changed, students need to understand, not only why it is important to think, write and speak effectively, but also why it is important to have an informed acquaintance with the arts, humanities, mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences.

Accordingly, we recommend that each of these domains have an articulated goal. We cannot speak to the other mandated areas, but we can speak to the value of education in the fine and performing arts. First, any curriculum aiming at an integral education of the person is incomplete without offering exposure to ways of understanding which are primarily experiential and interpretive. Second, the arts as aesthetic embodiments of home, community and affiliation provide windows to the understanding of our humanity. Third, informed acquaintance with the arts is important for all people so that they may go beyond simple "appreciation" to a heightened awareness of the ways aesthetic elements convey meaning and to an enhanced understanding of both natural and artificial features of the world. We suggest that this "goal area" be called "aesthetic engagement" and defined as "informed acquaintance with the aesthetic and intellectual experience of the fine and performing arts through direct engagement with art and artistic processes".

Specifically, we seek for students to address at least one of the following:  
experience and understand specific arts, performances, or practices in terms of their stylistic modes and/or histories engage with conceptual tools developed in various disciplines as well as

across disciplines to study the styles, meanings, and effects of expressive behavior study critical and theoretical perspectives for unraveling the complexities between practice and composition of expressive arts.

We recommend that courses designated "aesthetic engagement" meet at least one of the following conditions:

1. involve the experience of creative practice as a means to develop aesthetic understanding of human interactions and creativity.
2. emphasize explicit instruction in the philosophies and methods of understanding in the arts.
3. focus on the teaching of critical interpretation as a method of understanding art and artistic practices.

We note that the language of the State Board distribution requirement mandates Arts and Humanities, but that our current program allows students to elect only humanities courses, or only arts courses, or some combination of the two areas. Both areas are important, but humanities differ from the arts, and as several examples of "best practice" in general education indicate (e.g., Duke, Columbia, Alverno), students should be required to have informed acquaintance of both. Under the current 9-credit scheme, this could be accomplished with a sliding 3-6 credit scale for the arts and 3-6 credits in humanities. We believe that this change would have little effect on university resources and, by requiring students to take designated courses in each knowledge domain, assessment of what students know and can do in that area becomes possible. As departments with fully accredited programs (National Association of Schools of Music, National Association of Schools of Art and Design, National Association of Schools of Theatre), Music, Art, and Theatre faculty are no strangers to assessment. With articulated goals (i.e., aesthetic engagement, creative thinking) that address what students learn and can do as a result of taking our courses, we are confident that appropriate assessments can be designed.

We are also concerned about the proposal to expand the Communication requirement from 9 to 12 credits, particularly, if the overall credits of general education are to remain at 39 (or be reduced to 36 according to the recommendation of the strategic plan), and when the form of the requirements in the other goal areas (critical thinking, diversity, information literacy, quantitative reasoning) has yet to be determined. We have not seen any overview from the Task Force for how this will be accomplished and we are concerned that the cumulative impact of decisions made in the absence of an overarching plan may seriously detract from those areas not at the forefront of the task force agenda. Again, we note with dismay the absence of the arts and artistic processes from the Task Force working draft.

We would be happy to answer any questions about what we have had to say here. Thank you for the giving us the opportunity to express our views.

*November 17, 2006*