Report to the University Academic Planning Council
January 18, 2001

Recap of the General Education Requirements to Date: The UW-Madison campus-wide General Education requirements were adopted by the Faculty Senate in 1994 and became effective in 1996. The requirements consist of two levels of communication courses (Comm A and Comm B); two levels of quantitative reasoning courses (QR A and QR B); breadth requirements, and the ethnic studies requirement. The requirements are intended to enhance the undergraduate learning experience by fostering the development of reasoning and communication skills, and providing students with a broad perspective on their undergraduate education.

At its meeting of November 21, 1996, the University Academic Planning Council assigned the overall academic administration of the General Education Requirements to the College of Letters and Science to act as trustee on behalf of all schools and colleges. In carrying out this role, the College appointed Assistant Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson as Director of Undergraduate Education within L&S to serve both College needs and the broader needs of general education on campus, and also formed the Letters and Science General Education Committee to provide guidance on policy questions and issues.

At its meeting of December 18, 1997, the University Academic Planning Council affirmed that the College of Letters and Science would submit an annual report on the General Education requirements. This is the fourth such annual report.

Policy Items for the Council

Approval of new General Education courses: See list provided by Elaine Klein of the L&S Dean's Office.

Items on Which We Seek Advice of the Council

During last year's discussion of general education, Council members discussed the need to prevent curricular "drift" in Comm B and QR B courses-- the idea that course content will stray from the original criteria and purposes of these courses as instructors rotate through the courses and time passes. This has also been a concern of the L&S General Education Committee. To address this concern, we have been sending a special mailing each semester to instructors of Comm B and QR B courses, and chairs of departments offering such courses, reminding them of the special purposes and criteria that must be met. Gathering all the names and addresses of instructors (including TAs in the case of Comm B) has been a very labor-intensive undertaking; due to recent staff departures, we are unlikely to be able to do this in the current spring semester though we hope to resume it by the Summer Sessions. Suggestions as to a less labor-intensive method of continuing to remind instructors of the special criteria for these courses would be welcome.

Progress Reports
Articulating the Purpose of General Education to Students, Faculty, and Staff: The 1999-2000 academic year was the first in which four successive entering freshmen classes were under the new requirements. Since we are now at a point where the general education requirements are part of the normal curricular landscape of the campus, we want to ensure that the University community, including students, faculty, and staff develop an understanding of why general education is important and how it fits into the overall curricula of the University. With this goal in mind, we have undertaken the following:

- The L&S General Education Committee has rewritten the Undergraduate Catalog description of the requirements to give students a better understanding of the reasons for such requirements and plans to revise other materials during regular revision cycles. The Committee also plans to give the whole issue of articulation a high profile over the next few years.
- A comprehensive website describing most aspects of the General Education requirements was launched last spring. This website provides faculty, students, and staff with "one stop shopping" for information on General Education courses, policies, and frequently asked questions. The need for a central and accessible "home" site for general education on campus was becoming more and more evident as time went on and, with the help of Elaine Klein, it has now become a reality. The site address is...
- Explaining the General Education requirements to students in a way that best informs their course choices while giving them a realistic expectation of course and scheduling possibilities for freshmen was a major component of ongoing training for SOAR advisors this past summer. We expect to continue and possibly expand these efforts this coming summer.
- Understanding the purposes of general education is a need that goes beyond the freshman year and should be made evident to students throughout their undergraduate careers. To that end, the University, through the invited participation of Nancy Westphal-Johnson, is participating in a two-year Hewlett Foundation project based at Pennsylvania State University. The project focuses on increasing student understanding of general education through effective communication.

Assessment:

Quantitative Reasoning Assessment:

This fall the L&S General Education Committee established a subcommittee on Quantitative Reasoning Assessment to complement the work of the Quantitative Reasoning Assessment Project. While the QR Assessment Project has provided valuable assistance to course instructors in evaluating student readiness, the subcommittee's work focuses on the assessment of student outcomes and assessment of the QR requirements as a curricular component. The subcommittee has decided that its first project will be to review the curricular experiences of students who must complete coursework to satisfy the QR A requirement. The Office of Testing and Evaluation Services is generously providing assistance with this project by offering its database and analytical services. The subcommittee has received the first data set and will begin close study of it in the upcoming semester.
Verbal Assessment- Verbal Assessment Program Study of Comm B: The assessment of the Comm B course focused on writing performance and self-reported attitudes about writing, speaking, and library use among students completing the Comm B component of the general education requirements. The study was designed to assess the Comm B component of the general education communication program, while being sensitive to the great diversity of courses that meet this requirement.

Classes were randomly sampled from departments across campus, and a total of 70 classes were visited to solicit participation and informed consent from students. The primary participants in the study were students enrolled in their first Comm B class who consented to participate in the study (N = 446).

At the end of the semester, student participants were asked to complete a web-based survey about their Comm B course. In addition, a profile of each participant's academic background was assembled from student record data retrieved from the ISIS system. Instructors were also asked to provide final papers written by those students, which were subsequently evaluated by a team of trained raters according to a variety of writing performance criteria. Further information about student participants was gathered from questionnaires completed by instructors. The survey of instructors also solicited information about the class itself, which was supplemented by details retrieved from the timetable database. In total, the Comm B study yielded a wealth of information from a large and representative sample of courses and students: 369 students completed surveys, papers were collected for 385 students, 70 different sections from 24 departments were represented, and 58 instructors completed surveys.

Evaluating writing performance as evidenced in the Comm B student papers required developing appropriate criteria, assembling a team of paper readers, and training paper readers to apply the criteria in a consistent fashion. An initial set of writing performance criteria was developed by a subcommittee of the Verbal Assessment Committee comprised primarily of the Comm A course directors. To evaluate the relevance of these criteria to the Comm B course, we asked instructors participating in the Comm B study to rate the extent to which they attended to each performance outcome in their class. Then, seven graduate students with experience as instructors in the Comm A course were hired to evaluate the Comm B student papers. As part of training efforts, the paper readers applied the criteria to a small subset of papers and met to discuss decision rules and to explicate the criteria; over the course of three training sessions, a detailed coding manual was developed. Once a sufficient level of inter-rater reliability was obtained, each paper was evaluated by a subset of four readers. Reliability was assessed periodically to ensure that raters were maintaining equivalent standards for applying the criteria.

Preliminary results indicate that students performed reasonably well on the various criteria employed to rate the papers. More in-depth analyses, currently being conducted, will provide insight into the influence of both student background characteristics and course instructional format on students' writing, speaking, and information literacy skills.

Review of the Ethnic Studies Requirement: As a part of Plan 2008, Vice Chancellor Paul Barrows asked Dean Phillip Certain to appoint a committee to review the current Ethnic Studies requirement. This committee is chaired by Professor Richard Ralston of the Department of Afro-
American Studies and has been meeting since the spring semester, 1999-2000. With funding from the Assessment Council, the Committee has contracted with the LEAD Center to provide background assessment data to facilitate its deliberations.

**Access to General Education Courses:** The first few years of implementation were dominated by the need to develop an adequate number of Comm B courses and course spaces, especially when it became obvious that many students would complete more than one such course for a variety of reasons. After great effort on the part of many departments and individuals, we are now at a point where access to Comm B courses is at least barely adequate, although many spots are still temporary in nature and course access in general can be negatively affected by budgetary shortfalls. This continues to be a concern.

Access to QR-A and QR-B courses in Philosophy also continues to be somewhat problematic. Although access to these courses has been expanded in the last few years, space is still tight. Access to other QR courses appears adequate, though space is tight at some times in some of the courses.

**A Coordinator for Communication Courses:** Since the pace of development of new Comm B courses has naturally slowed over time, the Communication Implementation Committee has been disbanded and replaced by a Coordinator for Communication courses. Sherry Reames, formerly chair of the Communication Implementation Committee, has agreed to serve in this capacity with the L&S General Education Committee providing assistance and guidance as it is needed.

**Restructuring the L&S General Education Committee:** To provide for greater continuity of membership and broader disciplinary representation, the L&S General Education Committee has been restructured this year to provide faculty/academic staff representation for the common disciplinary groupings as well as for a representative of undergraduate advisors. Faculty and staff needed on the committee in their capacities as "experts" or representatives of units directly affected by the general education requirements now serve in an ex officio capacity.

**Submitted by:**

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Material on the Comm B assessment study was provided by Denise Solomon and Leanne Knobloch.
Members of the Letters and Science General Education Committee

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Letters and Science Administration, Chair

Term Members:
James Anderson, Philosophy (2000-01)
Ann Burgess, BioCore (2000-01)
Judith Burstyn, Chemistry (2000-01)
Sabine Gross, German (2000-01)
Charles Halaby, Sociology (2000-01)
Booth Fowler, Political Science and ILS
Ken Mayer, Political Science
Christine Schindler, Economics (2000-01)
Robert Wardrop, Statistics (2000-01)

Ex Officio Members:
Richard Brualdi, Mathematics
Brad Hughes, Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum
Elaine Klein, L&S Administration (2000-01)
Leanne Knobloch, Graduate Student, Communication Arts/Verbal Assessment Project (2000-01)
William Miller, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Sherry Reames, English
Joel Robbin, Mathematics
Bob Skloot, Theatre and Drama and Provost's Office
Denise Solomon, Communication Arts
Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service

Members of the L&S General Education Committee Subcommittee on Quantitative Reasoning (2000-01):
James Anderson, Philosophy
Allan Cohen, Testing and Evaluation
Charles Halaby, Sociology
Eden Inoway-Ronnie, Provost's Office
Elaine Klein, L&S Administration
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Members of the General Education Technical Working Group:
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Ruth McNichols, Undergraduate Admissions
Bill Miller, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Sharon Pero, Registrar's Office-Timetable and Course Scheduling
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Members of the Communication Implementation Committee (1999-2000):
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David Canon, Political Science
Sherry Reames, English, Chair
Mike Vandenheuvel, Theatre and Drama

Coordinator for Communication Courses (2000-01):
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