

## Annual Report on General Education at UW-Madison

Report to the University Academic Planning Council  
April 15, 2004

***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 by 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 has appointed an Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education (Nancy Westphal-Johnson) 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. Beginning in 2002-03, representation on the Committee was broadened to include representatives beyond Letters and Science as well as student representatives, and the Committee has also been asked to take up some broader issues in the area of general education.

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. The last reports on the UW-Madison General Education program were made in December, 2002 and June, 2003. The report in June, 2003 was limited to the General Education Committee report and recommendations on the Communication B study. Thus, this report recaps activities since December, 2002.

***Information Item--*** List of new General Education Courses: see attached list.

### **Status and Progress Reports**

***Ethnic Studies Implementation:*** There will be a separate report from the Ethnic Studies Implementation Committee.

***Assessment Plan for General Education:*** The UW-Madison General Education Committee adopted a formal long-range assessment plan in May, 2003 (attached). The Committee also received funding from the Provost's Office through the Assessment

Council for specific activities in the 2003-04 academic year. To date, these include the following:

- Continuing the work of the Verbal Assessment and Quantitative Assessment Programs, including publication of the Verbal Assessment Bulletin and the course testing services provided by the QAP.
- Conducting pilot student focus groups on the understanding and articulation of UW-Madison general education requirements (focus group leaders have been trained and student focus groups are planned for mid-April).
- Establishing a database of Communication B Student/Enrollment information: In spring, 2003, the Provost asked that the General Education Committee consider ways to reduce the overall costs of the general education program given current budget constraints. In response, the Committee spent considerable time discussing possible options in that direction. The consensus of the Committee was that we needed to find out more about how students complete the Communication B requirement to assess whether there are ways to streamline the number of Comm B courses that students might be taking inadvertently. We determined that in order to do this we that we needed to establish a database of Comm B student information. After some trial and error, Melania Alvarez-Adem and Michael Pflieger have been able to build such a database by joining the forces of the ISIS database and DARS and are now working to answer questions posed by the Committee such as, "From which departments are students taking the most Comm B courses?" "Are certain majors more prone to taking multiple Comm B courses?" Being able to answer such questions will enable us to consider how general education course offerings might be shaped in the future to best meet the goals of the requirement during a time of budgetary constraints.

In the course of working to establish this database, it has also been our happy discovery that DARS can serve as a powerful curricular analysis tool and we will be considering expanding its use to answer other questions.

***ACT/SAT Writing Assessment Component:*** At its meeting on May 1, 2003, the UW-Madison General Education Committee decided to formally endorse the concept of adding the ACT/SAT writing assessment component to the admissions requirement at UW-Madison at the request of the Director Undergraduate Admissions, Rob Seltzer. The sense of the Committee was that such a timed writing assessment at the high school junior level is far from an ideal measure (as compared to something like a portfolio analysis). However, this will signal the University's commitment to strong writing skills, will help to influence high school curricula, and may be of use in placement and assessment efforts on campus. There was some concern expressed about the extra testing costs for disadvantaged students.

***Math Core Plus and Other Alternative Math Curricula:*** After consulting with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Rob Seltzer, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, asked the General Education Committee to consider a statement/policy on Math Core Plus and possibly other alternative high school math curricula. He also asked that the

General Education Committee be ready to be called upon in a similar fashion to review other high school curricular offerings as the need arises. To consider the issue of Math Core Plus, we have established a subcommittee of the General Education Committee, chaired by Professor and L& S Associate Dean Charles Halaby (a former General Education Committee member), to consider this issue.

***Name of Program:*** From time to time, it has been suggested both within the General Education Committee and by others that we consider changing the name of our general education program. At its October 23, 2003 meeting, the General Education Committee decided to leave the name as is.

Submitted by:

Phillip R. Certain, Dean, College of Letters and Science

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, College of  
Letters and Science

**Members of the UW-Madison General Education Committee:**

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Letters and Science Administration, Chair

**Term Members:**

Judith Burstyn, Chemistry  
Camille Guerin-Gonzalez, Chicano/a Studies  
Liane Kosaki, Political Science  
Jonathan Martin, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences  
Pamela Potter, Music and German  
Ellen Sapega, Spanish and Portuguese  
Susan Smith, Nutritional Sciences  
John Strikwerda, Computer Sciences  
Michael Subkoviak, Educational Psychology  
Lydia Zepeda, Consumer Sciences

**Student Member:**

Alan Paberzs

**Ex Officio Members:**

Melania Alvarez-Adem, Quantitative Assessment Project  
Richard Brualdi, Math, Quantitative Reasoning Liaison  
Brad Hughes, Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum  
Elaine Klein, L&S Administration  
Abigail Loomis, Library and Information Literacy Instruction Program  
Michael Pflieger, L&S Student Academic Affairs  
Sherry Reames, English, Communication Liaison  
Joel Robbin, Math, Quantitative Assessment Project  
Virginia Sapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor, Political Science and Women's Studies  
Denise Solomon, Communication Arts, Verbal Assessment Project  
Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service

**Member of the Math Core Plus Subcommittee:**

Melania Alvarez-Adem, Quantitative Assessment Project  
James Anderson, Philosophy  
Richard Brualdi, Math and Quantitative Reasoning Liaison  
Charles Halaby, Sociology and L& S Associate Dean, Chair  
Eric Knuth, Curriculum and Instruction  
Sue Smith, Nutritional Sciences