

## Annual General Education Report to the University Academic Planning Council

June 21, 2007

In its role as trustee of the campus-wide General Education requirements and as agreed at the University Academic Planning Council of December 18, 1997, the College of Letters and Science is pleased to present the annual report on the General Education requirements at UW-Madison. As has been the case for the last several years, this report is prepared and submitted by the University General Education Committee (UGEC).

### Information and Updates:

***Credit for more than one Comm A course:*** At its May, 2006 meeting the University Academic Planning Council approved the following policy recommended by the UGEC: ***Students may receive degree credit for only one Communication A course taken in residence.*** This change in policy is intended to address problems faced by transfer students and students who receive credit for AP courses under the previous policy that students could receive credit for only one Comm A course (regardless of where it was taken). We have now received final approval from the Divisional Committee for the course prerequisite changes to enact this change in policy.

***Update and clarify language in Office of Admissions materials related to High School Math Preparation:*** At its May, 2006 meeting, the University Academic Planning Council referred to the University Committee the following updating and clarification of language about high school mathematics preparation (see background in Appendix A at the end of this document):

*To update and clarify language in the Office of Admissions material related to high school math preparation as specified in items 1-5.*

- *Three-year sequential integrated curricula like Core Plus and the three-year traditional curriculum (i.e., algebra 1, geometry, and advanced algebra) should be treated as equivalent for the purpose of satisfying the UW-Madison minimum requirement of three years of college preparatory mathematics for admission.*
- *The Office of Admissions should state in its printed and internet documents that the three-year traditional and integrated curricula both satisfy the minimum requirement.*
- *The Office of Admissions should state explicitly in its public documents that four or more years of high school mathematics, including a pre-calculus course, is recommended for an applicant to be competitive for admission.*
- *The Office of Admissions should include at its internet site a link to the Department of Mathematics' statement for incoming freshmen (<http://www.math.wisc.edu/~maribeff/highschool.html>).*
- *For the purpose of ranking applicants with respect to their preparation for college mathematics, the Office of Admissions may use as a rough guide the following order: 1) two or more years of (AP) calculus; 2) one year of (AP) calculus; 3) four years of*

*mathematics, including a fourth year of pre-calculus within a traditional or (supplemented) integrated curriculum; 4) three years of mathematics within either a traditional or integrated curriculum.”*

We have not yet heard from the University Committee on this issue.

**General Education Assessment:** The UGEC proposal for assessment funding for 2007-08 is attached, as is the General Education Assessment Activity Report for 2006-07 (Appendices B and C).

*Assessment Activity, 2006-2007:* Professor and Associate Dean Charles Halaby, Research Director for General Education Assessment, completed “An Assessment Study of the Effectiveness of the General Education Quantitative Reasoning B Requirement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.” (attached). He also headed up a Comm A survey study conducted in the spring semester, 2006-07. At the time of the writing of this report, data collection for this study is complete and survey data are being merged with information from student databases. A full report will be completed by September 2007, and will be submitted to the UGEC for consideration of policy implications.

*Previous Assessment Activity:* As noted in the last report to the UAPC, in May, 2006, the UW Survey Center conducted a survey of all faculty, academic staff, and graduate assistants who taught any course meeting any general education requirement in Fall 2005. Analysis of those data is now complete, and a report is available on the University General Education Website. A summary of findings is provided here.

Invitations to complete the web-based survey were sent to 1,572 instructors; 591 completed questionnaires. Although this rate of response was somewhat low (37.60%), the group of respondents were for the most part similar to the population in terms of employment category as well as in terms of the type of course taught. In general, respondents expressed value for the general education requirements, rating each of the individual requirements as “extremely” or “very” valuable. The Communication requirement received the highest ratings (93.7%) and the Ethnic Studies requirement received the lowest ratings (68.3%), with all others clustering in the 89-90% range. A majority of respondents indicated that there is the right amount of emphasis on breadth (75.9%), on Quantitative Reasoning (62.8%), on Communication (57.9%), and on Ethnic Studies (59.2), although many respondents also felt that emphasis could be increased for all categories.

When comparing these responses against the courses taught by respondents, however, patterns emerged that may warrant further discussion. In reporting the relative regard instructors hold for the requirements, some instructors regarded most highly those areas in which they were directly involved (e.g., teachers of biological science courses were significantly more likely to rate the Natural Science requirement to be “extremely valuable” than were teachers of other courses, and teachers of literature were more likely to rate the humanities and arts requirement “extremely valuable”). Instructors in some areas were also significantly *less* likely to rank *other* areas to be “extremely” or “very” valuable:

- Teachers of physical science courses were less likely to say that requirements for courses taken in the humanities and arts, the social sciences, and ethnic studies were extremely or very valuable, and were more likely to say these requirements were somewhat or not at all valuable. These teachers were also less likely to agree strongly or somewhat with the proposition that ethnic studies courses help students acquire new information or learn new skills.
- Teachers of humanities courses were less likely to say that the Quantitative Reasoning Requirement was extremely or very valuable, and were more likely to say it was somewhat or not at all valuable. These instructors, as well as instructors of literature courses, were also more likely to say that too much emphasis is placed on Quantitative Reasoning.

A series of questions was asked regarding the extent to which courses meeting these requirements contribute to students' acquisition of broad areas of learning that are usually associated with a program of general education. These included whether courses help students acquire new information or learn new skills; help students communicate effectively; help students understand, evaluate, and make decisions; help students to live in an increasingly complex and diverse world; and help students appreciate different ways of approaching knowledge. In all of these areas, a strong majority (mode 80-85%) of respondents "agreed strongly" or "agreed somewhat" that the requirements achieved these broad goals. As noted above, however, some significant patterns of response may bear further investigation.

Instructors were also asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived their own courses to contribute to broad general education learning goals that might pertain to their own courses. For all areas other than "breadth", the rate of response was low but favorable, with instructors generally reporting that their own courses support the general education goals. Most respondents (N=530) addressed the question of breadth, with 83.9% agreeing that their course supported the goal of teaching students to think in modes characteristic of the broad discipline "a lot" or "a great deal". That said, the majority of instructors (64.9%) also do not explicitly communicate the goals of the general education requirements to their students. Those who do so are more likely to be teachers of Communication A/B; those who are least likely to do so are teachers of courses conveying general breadth.

Finally, it is worth noting that 30% of the people who completed the survey responded to the invitation to provide additional comment on the topic of general education. The great majority (94) of these comments suggested means by which the existing system might be changed, with many suggestions to rebalance or restructure the existing scheme by adding or subtracting emphasis on one or more requirements, adding new requirements (e.g., "personal finance", "international studies", "environmental studies"), or to change the system by which courses are accepted to carry a general education designation. Among all of these many suggestions, no clear and compelling pattern emerged. (Twenty-five responses advocated changes to be made to the Ethnic Studies Requirement, several of which had been made by the time the survey was in the field.) Embedded in many of these comments were statements citing the value of broad education, a topic that 26 respondents addressed more generally, expressing it as a value to be pursued throughout one's educational experience. Although we find we cannot interpret these comments in a way that would provide greater direction to the administration of the

requirements, we interpret these responses as, on the whole, signifying instructors' value for the concept of general education. Although the program may warrant some improvement, it continues to be essential to undergraduate education.

***Incorporation of Ethnic Studies into the University-Wide General Education Requirements:*** In Fall 2005, administration of the university-wide ethnic studies requirement (ESR) was formally incorporated into the duties of the UGEC. A UGEC subcommittee was established for purposes of reviewing proposals to add courses to the ESR course array. Since the last report to the UAPC, nine new courses were reviewed and approved to carry "e" designation; a list of new courses is appended to this report (Appendix D). The committee also approved reinstatement of two courses from which the ethnic studies designation had been dropped when all ESR courses were reviewed in 2003-2005.

***Exceptions:*** The Ethnic Studies Subcommittee provides consultation to academic and advising deans on particularly complex requests for exceptions granted to the ESR. In some cases, these requests involve student petitions to receive ethnic studies credit for work conducted elsewhere in cases that do not readily transfer into the UW-Madison curriculum; students seeking credit for courses taken at UW-Madison but which lack the "e" designation; or from departments seeking assistance as they respond to the call to enhance the ESR course array. The committee considered five such requests; two of which were approved.

***Access:*** In 2006-2007, more than seven thousand students (7,277) enrolled in courses carrying the ethnic studies designation; 90% of these courses also satisfied breadth and other requirements. Of these courses, 64% carried the Social Science designation, 20% were Humanities, 9% were Literature, and 5% were "Social Science or Humanities". L&S staff will continue to monitor course access to ensure that students are able to satisfy this requirement and progress to degree is not delayed.

**Respectfully submitted by:**

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

Elaine Klein, Assistant Dean, Academic Planning, Program Review & Assessment, College of Letters and Science

## **University General Education Committee, 2006-07**

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Letters and Science Administration, Chair

### *Term Members:*

- Larry Bank, Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Mark Browne, School of Business
- Cary Forest, Physics
- Jacqueline Hitchon, Life Sciences Communication
- Susan Johnson, History
- J. Mark Kenoyer, Anthropology
- Mary Ellen Murray, Nursing
- Mary Rossa, Communication Arts
- Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor, German

### *Student Members Appointed by ASM:*

- Hilary Minor
- Deborah Meiners

### *Ex Officio:*

- Mo Noonan Bischof, Assistant to the Provost, Co-Chair, University Assessment Council
- Aaron Brower, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning and Social Work (Semester II)
- Richard Brualdi, Math, Quantitative Reasoning Liaison
- Charles Halaby, Research Director for General Education Assessment, Sociology and Assoc. Dean-Soc. Science, L&S
- Brad Hughes, Director, Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum
- Elaine Klein, Assistant Dean, L&S Academic Planning, Program Review & Assessment
- Abigail Loomis, Coordinator, Library & Information Literacy Instruction Program
- Sherry Reames, English; Communication Liaison
- Virginia Sapiro, Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, Political Science and Women's Studies (Semester I)
- Wren Singer, Orientation and New Student Programs
- Greg Smith, L&S Student Academic Affairs
- Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service
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### *Ethnic Studies Subcommittee*

- Susan Johnson, History (Acting Chair, Semester II)
- J. Mark Kenoyer, Anthropology (Chair, Semester I)
- Elaine Klein, L&S Administration
- Michael Olneck, Sociology and Educational Policy Studies
- Christina Greene, Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies Programs

- Tori Richardson, L&S Student Academic Affairs

## **Appendix A: Language from the UGEC May, 2006 report to the UAPC concerning Core-Plus Math**

**Background:** In 2000, Chancellor Wiley (then Provost) was called upon to respond to inquiries from two Wisconsin school districts regarding the acceptability of “Core Plus” or “Integrated Math” curricula for admission to UW-Madison. Chancellor Wiley’s response established an interim practice in which the three years of sequential Core Plus curriculum were deemed to satisfy the existing minimum three-year math requirement for admission. (The Chancellor also noted that 85-90% of students admitted exceed the 3-year minimum, and encouraged students to take an additional year of high school math to be competitive.) The Chancellor, the Provost, and the Director of Admissions asked the UGEC to study this issue and proceed with recommendations. The General Education Subcommittee on High School Mathematics Curricula was convened in 2003-04 and chaired by Professor of Sociology Charles Halaby, the Research Director for Assessment in General Education. The subcommittee completed its work and submitted a report in March 2005. In May 2005, the UGEC discussed the report and the committee’s recommendations, and charged the chair of the UGEC to explore the feasibility of implementing these changes with both the Office of Admissions and the Mathematics Department, both of which would be required to adjust the language they use in communicating with students about math preparation. Having obtained the endorsement and cooperation of these units, the UGEC now presents the committee’s recommendations to the UAPC for further consideration and action appropriate to governance procedures.

We note that these recommendations do not propose to alter admissions policy, but to clarify existing policy on minimum math preparation in light of the State of Wisconsin’s high school math standards and the curricular innovations that implement those standards. We are concerned that failure to recognize these high school curricular changes will unintentionally discourage students from seeking admission to UW-Madison. Therefore, Recommendation 1 clarifies the existing minimum requirement for math preparation to explicitly include three years of Core Plus/Integrated Math; Recommendations 2 and 3 focus on clearly communicating about these minima in light of actual admissions results and what constitutes a “competitive advantage”; Recommendation 4 further clarifies expectations by providing good advice about math preparation to potential students; and the final recommendation offers guidance to UW-Madison admissions counselors who will consider transcripts of students who have taken traditional and “core-plus/integrated math” curricula.

## **Appendix D: Ethnic Studies Courses and Exceptions**

New courses approved:

- Asian Amer. Studies 210 Asian Amer. Popular Culture
- Asian Amer. Studies 230 Topics in Comparative Asian Amer. Studies
- Asian Amer. Studies 430 Asian Amer. Culture Studies
- Ed. Pol. Studies 622 History of Radical & Experimental Education in the US & UK
- English 654 Race & Sexuality in American Literature
- History 246 Southeast Asian Refugees of the "Cold" War
- History 160 Asian American History: Movement & Dislocation
- History 161 Asian American History: Settlement & National Belonging
- History 510 Race & Media Culture in the U.S.

Requests for Exceptions to the Ethnic Studies Requirement

- Transfer course. Denied - syllabus did not reflect required ethnic studies content.
- Graduate seminar. Denied - other than counting as “advanced level”, graduate courses are not otherwise allowed to meet basic undergraduate requirements.
- Directed study. Denied - directed study courses are not allowed to meet general education requirements.
- Topics courses (two requests). Both requests approved - syllabus met expectations regarding quantity and focus of content. In the second case, the course was later approved as an ESR course but implantation of the new course number was delayed. Approval was extended retroactively to all students enrolled in Spring 2006, which enhanced ESR access by 90 seats. Furthermore, the department offering these topics courses has been invited to propose a “Topics in Ethnic Studies” course (within guidelines and in consultation with the committee) in anticipation that such flexibility will be needed in the future.