Report of the University General Education Committee, 2016-17

The University General Education Committee (UGEC) is responsible for oversight of the campus-wide undergraduate General Education Requirements, or GER. The requirements were adopted by the Faculty Senate in May 1994, after review by a faculty committee that found common ground among all UW-Madison undergraduate schools and colleges that “every graduate should be able to write and speak with competence, employ tools and methods of mathematics and quantitative reasoning, and possess knowledge in one or more of the natural sciences and social sciences, in literature, and in at least one or more of the human disciplines” (Bitzer Committee Report, p. 5). At the time the report was submitted, no campus-wide requirements existed to ensure a base level of knowledge and skills that characterize each UW-Madison student. A suite of course-based requirements was proposed and adopted, and the College of Letters & Science (which fields most courses meeting the requirements) was entrusted to implement and administer the requirements.

The Dean of L&S convenes the UGEC, appointing members in consultation with the deans of the other undergraduate schools and colleges (Attachment A). The committee reports to the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC), which is empowered to approve policy changes the committee may recommend related to the requirements. UGEC operating procedures and other information about the GER program may be found online at http://gened.wisc.edu.

Though the requirements have remained largely the same as originally proposed, the purpose has been more clearly articulated: today, these requirements are understood to exist to help ensure that every baccalaureate student at UW-Madison acquires the essential core of an undergraduate education, to prepare students for living a productive life, being citizens of the world, appreciating aesthetic values, and engaging in lifelong learning in a changing world. Students complete coursework across the humanities and arts, social studies, and natural sciences, and in communication and quantitative reasoning. Students must also complete one course designated as meeting the Ethnic Studies Requirement, which promotes learning related to culturally diverse U.S. society. GER is a component of the “Wisconsin Experience,” complementing the work students do in their majors and degree programs, and in extracurricular and high-impact learning experiences.

The report that follows provides an overview of topics on which the committee, its liaisons, and subcommittees focused attention in 2016-17. Please note that the UGEC is requesting a revision to the criteria for ESR courses.

I. GER Course Array

New Courses. Courses are added to or removed from the GER course array through the online course proposal process, which ensures that standard governance procedures are followed. Departments may seek review for Communication A or B, Quantitative Reasoning A or B, or Ethnic Studies courses, or for courses to carry the L&S Breadth Designations. These reviews involve faculty and staff who understand the subject matter, GER course criteria, and GER learning outcomes. Communication and QR reviews are assigned to a faculty liaison, and requests for ESR designation are referred to the Ethnic Studies Subcommittee. Requests to have
courses carry designations for Breadth are reviewed by the L&S Curriculum Committee, which has representation from faculty across the three GER breadth divisions. Finally, because Comm A and QR-A courses are narrowly defined requirements met by a small number of courses, special committees are convened to consider occasional requests for new courses in these areas. If a request for a GER designation is approved, it is assigned a course attribute that can easily be audited by the Degree Audit Reporting System. Students who take courses with GER attributes will find their GER met regardless of the School/College in which their degree is earned.

In 2016-17, there were two noteworthy issues related to course development:

- Six proposals to create new ESR courses were submitted. All were evaluated by the Ethnic Studies Subcommittee and five were approved to meet the ESR:
  - Nursing 510 “Culturally Congruent Practice”
  - Communication Arts 373 “Intercultural Communication and Rhetoric”
  - Public Affairs 510 “Inequality, Race, and Public Policy”
  - Geography 305 “Introduction to The City”
  - Educational Policy Studies 505 “Issues in Urban Education”
- Three new QR-A courses were proposed. These proposals prompted extensive consultation between the QR liaison and the departments, and the ad hoc QR committee was convened to review one request. Two proposals were revised (from QR-A to QR-B); for the third, discussions with the Math department are ongoing about overlap with an existing course and potential collaboration to reformulate that course.

II. Assessment of Student Learning

Since 2003, the UGEC has used a formally adopted long-range Assessment Plan to guide campus-level efforts to understand the impact and efficacy of the General Education Requirements. (Reports of GER assessment projects can be found online at https://gened.wisc.edu/AssessmentReports.) Over the years, the UGEC has updated the GER learning outcomes and worked to adapt its assessment strategy to study more broadly the four domains of learning relative to GER, rather than to assess individual courses or specific components of the individual requirements.

In Spring 2017, the UGEC added these broadly stated GER Learning Outcomes to the General Education Requirements section of “The Guide” that will soon replace the Undergraduate Catalog. Including this information in the “single source” for program information will better convey to students and other stakeholders the role these requirements play in undergraduate education at UW-Madison. (Attachment B).

**GER Assessment Focus: Ethnic Studies Curriculum Mapping**

The most significant GER assessment activity undertaken in 2016-17 was a comprehensive curriculum mapping effort focused on the ESR course array. The list of ESR courses was last reviewed in 2003-04. Since then, new procedures for administering the requirement and operationalizing course criteria were implemented. The faculty also articulated learning outcomes for ESR courses, and then led an effort to assess student learning relative to the
requirement. In 2016-17, at the request of Provost Mangelsdorf and Dean Scholz, the Ethnic Studies Subcommittee undertook a new study of the ESR course array. The committee gathered and evaluated 225 syllabi for 178 active ESR courses to determine whether they conform to current course criteria, and whether these courses have the capacity to promote student learning relative to the ESR learning outcomes. The committee was asked to recommend removal of courses, offer counsel about areas of the curriculum where new ESR courses might be needed, and recommend revisions to the criteria to promote better achievement of the learning outcomes. The committee went above and beyond this charge, surveying instructors about student learning as well as instructional opportunities and challenges relative to the requirement. (Attachment C)

Importantly, the survey of faculty affirmed instructors’ perceptions of alignment between their course materials and the ESR learning outcomes, and the majority of instructors reported their perception that their courses were effective in helping students achieve those outcomes – though a large number of respondents recommended to the committee that a more direct assessment of student learning should be undertaken.

Several recommendations arising from this report fall under the current purview of the ES Subcommittee’s responsibility for managing the application of the ESR designation for courses (removal of ESR from particular courses, monitoring syllabi, assessment of ESR outcomes, outreach about the ESR course array, working as a faculty to develop best practices for online ESR instruction, developing new courses, etc.) Other recommendations (e.g., TA allocation and training, faculty hiring and support, the nature of instructors’ experiences and perceptions teaching ESR courses), represent counsel offered to University leaders about how best to support effective teaching with respect to the requirement.

The committee also recommended revision of the ESR course criteria, which the UGEC endorsed, to increase the minimum US content standard for ESR courses that approach ESR topics from a comparative perspective, from 25% to 50%. Also, consistent with the current expectation that all syllabi include student learning outcomes, the committee expects that ESR courses should include relevant ESR learning outcomes on the syllabus.

The following criteria are proposed:

- ESR courses must be offered for a minimum of 3 credits.

- Syllabus and reading list must demonstrate that the course material is centrally focused on the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of persistently marginalized racial and ethnic minorities and/or indigenous peoples in the United States.

- Courses that are not centrally focused on the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of persistently marginalized racial and ethnic minorities and/or indigenous peoples in the United States may be designated as ESR classes under certain circumstances.
  - Courses that explore the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of racial and ethnic minorities and/or indigenous peoples in a comparative international format
must devote at least 50% of the course (syllabus, reading list, course content, and student assessment) to exploring the experiences and concerns of persistently marginalized groups in the United States.

- In cases where religion is intertwined with respect to persistently marginalized racial and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples in the United States, courses that focus on religion may fulfill the ESR.

- Syllabus should list the ESR Essential Learning Outcomes.

These revisions require approval by the UAPC before they may be implemented; we suggest that they be implemented for new courses proposed in Fall 2017 with effective dates no earlier than Fall 2018. Since we have the syllabi for all currently approved ESR courses, in Summer 2017 and in 2017-18, we will identify current courses that might not meet this standard, and will reach out to departments and faculty with an expectation that by Fall 2019, all courses will meet the new standard.

Finally, the committee noted the strong recommendation by the faculty that the ESR be expanded, and recommended careful study of the university’s capacity to require a six-credit ESR learning experience. In discussion of this recommendation, the UGEC noted that such a recommendation might gain ground were the second course to include a broader definition (e.g., intercultural studies, international studies). Both committees will likely continue this study and discussion in 2017-18.

**GER Assessment Focus: Communication B Curriculum Calibration**

In Spring 2016, the UGEC Communication liaison, Professor David Zimmerman, undertook a review of all syllabi for courses that meet the Communication B requirement, seeking to determine if these courses meet Comm B course criteria and have the capacity to support the learning outcomes articulated for the requirement. Due to the nature of the requirement (which relies on a particular pedagogy, rather than course content), the study was conducted as a survey of faculty and staff, which also afforded an opportunity to seek information from instructors concerning engagement and oversight, curricular gaps, and future opportunities in this curricular area. Syllabi were obtained for 98 of 104 Comm B courses taught by 158 faculty and staff instructors between Fall 2011 and Spring 2016; 67% of Comm B instructors responded to the survey.

The learning outcomes implicit in Comm B were made explicit and articulated clearly only within the past few years, as part of the UGEC’s efforts to improve assessment strategies. Thus, an important finding of this study was that instructors affirmed the learning outcomes associated with Comm B courses, and an overwhelming majority reported that students do indeed make gains in their courses relative to those outcomes. Virtually all instructors regard their courses as complying with course criteria and supporting the outcomes; however, careful review of syllabi and survey responses found many courses that require attention, and instructors themselves noted areas where their courses required recalibration to better comply. The greatest challenges are found in teaching oral communication skills, finding adequate time for individual student-
instructor conferences, and ensuring that the long-standing student-to-instructor ratio is maintained for these courses.

The report (Attachment D) offered several recommendations and advice that will inform administrative decisions and faculty oversight of this part of the General Education Requirements. No recommendations were made concerning policy changes.

**UPDATE: Ongoing Implementation of Results of 2012-13 ESR Assessment**

We continue to implement recommendations arising from the 2012-2013 assessment of student learning in ESR courses. Staff in L&S worked with colleagues across campus advising units to implement the recommendation that students be required to complete the requirement within the first 60 credits completed in residence. Outreach to Peer Advisors during SOAR’s “Terrific Tuesdays,” improved communication with advising units across campus about the impact the requirement may have on student learning, and greater advocacy with strong partners (e.g., First Year Interest Groups, the Center for the First-Year Experience) seems to be shifting enrollments into these courses, and into a wider array of courses.

Faculty who teach in Ethnic Studies areas (both in the context of traditional departments as well as in ES focused subject areas) continue to build course capacity to allow the university to serve more students early in their undergraduate careers. As noted in the Report of the ES Subcommittee, providing TA support for small and mid-sized courses has increased capacity in a wider array of ESR courses than previously available.

**UPDATE: Implementation of QR-A Requisite Recommendations.** Recommendations arising from the Summer 2015 QR-A curriculum mapping and calibration have been implemented: minimum prerequisites for QR-A courses are now aligned. These revisions also accommodate changes in UW-Madison’s remedial Math courses, and will ensure that students who are required to take remedial math progress through QR in a timely sequence.

Finally, the committee continues to hope that as UW-Madison works to develop a new course proposal system and new course evaluation system, relevant General Education outcomes might be incorporated into these processes, for example, by automatically including GER learning outcomes on GER course syllabi, or by generating GER learning outcomes automatically on course evaluation surveys.
IV. Other Matters

The UGEC also discussed policy matters and other issues related to supporting a breadth of study as part of undergraduate education.

- **The Wisconsin Experience – Updated.** In December 2016, Vice Provosts Lori Berquam and Steve Cramer met with UGEC to discuss a new articulation of *The Wisconsin Experience*, which the UGEC enthusiastically endorsed.

- **UW-Madison Mission and University General Education.** In anticipation of the decennial accreditation review by the Higher Learning Commission, the HLC Advisory Committee invited the UGEC to consider the important question of whether the UW-Madison mission that was articulated in 1988 remains current with respect to the mission and purpose of University General Education. The UGEC strongly endorsed that mission statement, finding in it an extraordinarily flexible and forward-thinking statement of institutional values. (Attachment E)

- **UW-Madison Liberal Arts Essay Contest.** A subcommittee of the UGEC directed the first annual scholarship competition focused on the liberal arts. This competition, which arose from the now-defunct UW System Liberal Arts Essay Contest, challenges students to articulate, in their own words, the role liberal education plays in helping them to understand their lived experience. The winning essays may be found online at http://ls.wisc.edu/news/liberal-arts-as-a-tool-for-change.

On behalf of the University General Education Committee, this report is submitted by

Elaine M. Klein, Chair, UGEC
Associate Dean for Academic Planning, College of Letters and Science
May 25, 2017

Attachments:

A. UGEC Membership, 2017-18
B. The Guide: General Education Requirements
D. Communication Part B 2016 Curriculum Calibration Report (December 2016)
E. Memorandum, Klein to Cramer, Milner, and Wanner, 12 May 2017, “University General Education Committee Affirmation of UW-Madison Mission”

Attachment B removed, see http://guide.wisc.edu/undergraduate/#requirementsforundergraduatetext
Attachment C removed, see UAPC Doc 2017.09.14.13
at https://apir.wisc.edu/academic-planning/uapc-meeting-information/september-14-2017/
### Term Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Bohnhof</td>
<td>112 Agricultural Engineering</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bohnhoff@wisc.edu">bohnhoff@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-9546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Hark</td>
<td>3208 Human Ecology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hark@wisc.edu">hark@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-2651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Reaves</td>
<td>228 Hiram Smith Hall</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sireaves@wisc.edu">sireaves@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>0-0732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Fedenia</td>
<td>5275 Grainger Hall</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mfedenia@wisc.edu">mfedenia@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bret Largent</td>
<td>241 Birge Hall</td>
<td><a href="mailto:brlargent@wisc.edu">brlargent@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-6799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Thal</td>
<td>4118 Mosse Humanities</td>
<td><a href="mailto:thal@wisc.edu">thal@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-6033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelley Harris-Johnson</td>
<td>2536 Microbial Sciences Building</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kelley.harris@wisc.edu">kelley.harris@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>0-0677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Gooding</td>
<td>320 W J Brogden Psychology Bldg</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dgooding@wisc.edu">dgooding@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-3918</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ex Officio Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mo Noonan-Bischof</td>
<td>Associate Vice Provost</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mo.bischof@wisc.edu">mo.bischof@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-4413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina Lowery</td>
<td>Assessment Coordinator, Office of the Provost</td>
<td><a href="mailto:regina.lowery@wisc.edu">regina.lowery@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>890-2973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedek Valko</td>
<td>Quantitative Reasoning Liaison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:valko@math.wisc.edu">valko@math.wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>3-2782 / 3-3054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimbrin Cornelius</td>
<td>L&amp;S Administration</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kimbrin.cornelius@wisc.edu">kimbrin.cornelius@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>890-3527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Clarke</td>
<td>Center for the First Year Experience</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kevin.clarke@wisc.edu">kevin.clarke@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-3079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor</td>
<td>Campus LEAP Co-Liaison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jvtaylor@wisc.edu">jvtaylor@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-5790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Cramer</td>
<td>Vice Provost for Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td><a href="mailto:steven.cramer@wisc.edu">steven.cramer@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-5246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Clarke</td>
<td>Center for the First Year Experience</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kevin.clarke@wisc.edu">kevin.clarke@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-3079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Westphal-Johnson</td>
<td>Campus LEAP Co-Liaison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nancy.westphaljohnson@wisc.edu">nancy.westphaljohnson@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>3-2506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare Huhn</td>
<td>Academic Planning and Institutional Research</td>
<td><a href="mailto:clare.huhn@wisc.edu">clare.huhn@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-9276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Stoeckel</td>
<td>Interim Director of Teaching and Learning Programs, UW-Madison Libraries</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sheila.stoeckel@wisc.edu">sheila.stoeckel@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-2755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liane Kosaki</td>
<td>Undergraduate Advising</td>
<td><a href="mailto:liane.kosaki@wisc.edu">liane.kosaki@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Phelps</td>
<td>FIGS Director</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nathan.phelps@wisc.edu">nathan.phelps@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>3-6904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Wollack</td>
<td>Research Director for GE Assessment</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jwollack@wisc.edu">jwollack@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>2-0675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Zimmerman</td>
<td>Communication Liaison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dazimmerman@wisc.edu">dazimmerman@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>3-3785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Cheng</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cicheng@wisc.edu">cicheng@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Hill</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rjhill@wisc.edu">rjhill@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Johnson</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sljohnson5@wisc.edu">sljohnson5@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine Klein (ex officio)</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:elaine.klein@wisc.edu">elaine.klein@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Lepowsky</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lepowsky@wisc.edu">lepowsky@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry Nesper</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lnesper@wisc.edu">lnesper@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna Nobles</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jnobles@ssc.wisc.edu">jnobles@ssc.wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo Noonan Bischof</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mo.bischof@wisc.edu">mo.bischof@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Phelps</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:nathan.phelps@wisc.edu">nathan.phelps@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori Richardson</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tori.richardson@wisc.edu">tori.richardson@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherene Sherrard</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:csherrard@wisc.edu">csherrard@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon Sparks</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sparks2@wisc.edu">sparks2@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Thornton</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mcthormn@wisc.edu">mcthormn@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Yu (Chair)</td>
<td>ES Subcommittee:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tpyu@wisc.edu">tpyu@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joni Brown</td>
<td>Assistants to the Committees:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jonibrown@wisc.edu">jonibrown@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td>5-0457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayanna Drakos</td>
<td>Assistants to the Committees:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:drakos@wisc.edu">drakos@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gianna Dinon</td>
<td>Student Representatives:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dinon@wisc.edu">dinon@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel Noll</td>
<td>Student Representatives:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:noll@wisc.edu">noll@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anisa Yudawanti</td>
<td>Student Representatives:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:yudawanti@wisc.edu">yudawanti@wisc.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**University General Education Committee 2016-2017**

*Elaine Klein (Chair)*  
Associate Dean Academic Planning | L&S Administration | 307D South Hall | elaine.klein@wisc.edu | 5-8484
Communication Part B (Comm B)
2016 Curriculum Calibration Report
University General Education Committee

Comm B Courses: An Overview

Comm B courses are part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's General Education curriculum and help to ensure that every graduate of the university acquires the essential core of an undergraduate education. Providing instruction in transferable communication and research-gathering skills, Comm B courses are essential for students' success across their university coursework. Training students to gather and assess information from a variety of sources and to present different kinds of information, insight, and analysis to diverse audiences, Comm B courses are also essential for students' preparation for public life in a rapidly changing world. Offering focused instruction in writing proficiency and public speaking, the two areas that employers have identified as most needed by new-graduate hires, Comm B courses also help to prepare students for career success.1

Communication B ("Comm B") courses are low-enrollment courses involving substantial instruction in the four modes of literacy (that is, speaking, reading, writing, and listening), with emphasis on speaking and writing, either in the conventions of specific fields or in more advanced courses in communication. Comm-B courses are offered by departments across campus and vary widely in topic, content, and format, but they all teach research, writing, and speaking skills in close conjunction with course content. In Comm-B courses, students learn to:

- identify and make skillful use of relevant, reliable, and high quality research sources appropriate to the course subject and discipline
- make productive use of the writing process, including brainstorming, outlining, drafting, incorporating feedback, and revising, to develop a fledgling idea into a formal paper, presentation, and/or project
- produce formal writing and oral presentations that are clear, persuasive, well-organized, and polished
- make proper use of expressive conventions and protocols (e.g., organization, content, presentation, formatting, and style) appropriate to the genres of communication relevant to the course subject or discipline.

Every UW-Madison undergraduate student must complete a Comm-B course or a course at another university equivalent to a Comm-B course.

---

One hundred and four (104) Comm B courses have been taught in the past five years (Fall 2011-Spring 2016). They were offered by 48 departments in seven Schools/Colleges. These courses include large lectures with many designated Comm B sections led by trained TAs, midsize lectures with no TA involvement, seminars, labs, and research tutorials. Comm B courses bear between two and five credits, depending on the course structure. Some Comm B courses integrate the Comm B instruction across lecture and discussion section; others are designed to have additional sections in which Comm B instruction is delivered (and when they do, they are offered for additional credit).

Thirty percent of Comm B courses are taught by a tenure or tenure-track faculty member, 43% by academic staff, and 27% by a graduate assistant.\(^2\)

Generalizations about Comm B class size are hard to make, given the variety of Comm B course structures. Here is an enrollment snapshot of one common course structure. In Fall 2015, there were 70 lecture sections of 3-credit "catalog-level" courses (defined below). Ninety percent of these had 23 or fewer students, and 77% had 20 or fewer students. Seven lectures had more than 23 students (they ranged from 52-146 students); each of these lectures was structured with discussion sections taught by TAs. Most of these sections had 17 or fewer students, although a few had 20 students.

Comm B courses have one of two administrative designations. A "catalog level" designation signifies that the course is only offered as a Comm B course. Every iteration of the course must be taught with Comm B learning goals in mind and must meet the formal criteria for Comm B courses. A "section level" designation allows departments to offer a non-Comm B version of the course. This flexibility is useful in cases where department resources do not allow for TA support, or for cases where a course might be offered in the compressed Summer session when Comm B may be challenging to teach. Among the courses surveyed, 70% have the "catalog level" designation, and 30% have the "section level" designation.

**Prior Work Assessing Comm B**

a. A large-scale study in 2001 by the Verbal Assessment Project (chaired by Professor Denise Solomon, Communication Arts) evaluated samples of student writing and surveyed students about their perceptions and attitudes related to writing. The executive summary and the full report and appendix are available on the General Education website. This study led to the adjustment of course criteria to improve student learning in the dimension of oral communication skills, and to provide better support for instructors who teach these skills to students. These results also helped guide advisors to counsel students about which Communication A ("Comm A") courses might complement their studies.

b. An ad hoc working group convened by Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson, then chair of the University General Education Committee (UGEC), conducted an analysis in

\(^2\) Source: 2015 APIR study of curricular trends in the General Education course array
2004 of student course-taking patterns to identify curricular redundancy in the Comm-B course array and to identify transfer credit issues. Using data from the data warehouse and from analysis of student transcripts, this administrative study allowed the General Education Program to better manage limited resources for a costly requirement by reducing redundancy (e.g., removing Comm B from courses in which another Comm B course served as a requisite). Follow-up work in 2005 addressed issues with course transfer and students receiving credit for Comm B for courses that were not equivalent with respect to embedded writing pedagogy.

b. In 2010 the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR) examined the benefit of enforcing the requirement to take Comm A before Comm B. The analysis did not find sufficient evidence of disadvantage to the small number of students who complete the courses out of sequence.

c. A 2015 APIR study of curricular trends in the General Education course array identified aging courses and noted concerns about the relatively low number of faculty providing Comm B instruction.

The current study is a direct outcome of this work evaluating curricular trends. It sought to determine if—and provides assurance that—courses in the General Education course array are meeting Comm B course criteria and supporting the learning outcomes articulated for the requirement. The study also sought to determine if—and provides assurance that—these courses have an appropriate level of faculty and staff engagement and oversight.

2016 Survey Aims and Methods

In Spring 2016, the General Education Communication Part B Working Group, consisting of David Zimmerman (UGEC Communication Liaison), Elaine Klein (Associate Dean of Academic Planning and Chair, UGEC), and Kimbrin Cornelius (Senior Administrative Program Specialist) surveyed UW-Madison faculty and staff who taught at least one Comm B course in the previous five years.

The survey had four primary aims:

1. to illuminate faculty and staff instructor perspectives on Comm B learning outcomes and requirements
2. to show whether actual Comm B instructional priorities and practices align satisfactorily with the expectations for Comm B instruction articulated by the UGEC, and if not, where they fall short and why
3. to show if, and to what extent, Comm B instructors believe Comm B courses succeed in helping students gain proficiency in the four core Comm B skills
4. to help the Communication Liaison and administrators identify ways to maintain or increase the relevance, value, and effectiveness of Comm B instruction

The survey featured 21 questions convened around five topics:
i. the instructor's perspective on the General Education learning outcomes articulated for Comm B courses
ii. practical information about the instructor's Comm B course
iii. the instructor's assessment of student learning in the course
iv. department or instructor plans to revise the course, including adapting it for online or summer offerings
v. the instructor's use of campus resources to support and enrich Comm B instruction.

Respondents had several opportunities to add explanatory comments.

The survey was emailed to 158 faculty and staff instructors of all Comm B courses taught in the last five years (Fall 2011-Spring 2016). In instances where TAs were primarily instructors (for example, English 201), the survey was sent to a coordinating faculty member. The survey asked faculty and staff instructors (hereafter, "instructors") to submit an updated syllabus of their Comm B course. Where a large number of faculty or staff taught the course, they were advised they could coordinate one response.

One hundred and six (106) instructors responded, including at least one instructor for 89 Comm B courses. Departments submitted updated syllabi for nine additional courses, on request. No information was submitted for 6 courses.3

Survey Findings

1. Do Comm B instructors think that the learning outcomes articulated for Comm B courses are valuable?

Yes. All respondents agreed that "undergraduate students should acquire" the skills that Comm B courses teach.

2a. Are Comm B courses in compliance with articulated Comm B course requirements and expectations?

Virtually all respondents reported that their Comm B course complied with the formal Comm B course criteria listed on the survey, but the information they provided about their courses indicates that almost a fifth of the courses fell short of meeting these criteria. In almost every case, the compliance issue had to do with the oral communication requirement. Of the 101

3 See Appendix, point 2. In five cases where the sole instructor of a course retired or left UW-Madison, the lack of response was expected. Twenty-two active catalog-level Comm B courses were not offered in the past 5 years and were not included in the survey. Fifty-one section-level Comm B courses have not been taught with the Comm B designation in past 5 years and also were not included.
respondents, 18 reported providing fewer than the required "two opportunities for each student to be graded for oral communication" or failing to offer at least one "informal, ungraded opportunity to develop and receive feedback on their speaking skills." These results highlight an area where instructors may need reminders or guidance about giving adequate emphasis to oral communication skills, but some of the reported failures may not reflect actual pedagogical shortcomings. About half of these courses relied on TAs to do most or all of the Comm B instruction, and these TAs, who were not surveyed, may have added assignments or activities that brought the course into full compliance.4

The compliance data indicate that Comm B instructors take seriously Comm B's emphasis on meeting with students individually to discuss their speaking or writing. Around 24% of respondents (or their TAs) hold at least three conferences with each student, and 36% hold two.

2b. Do instructors have difficulty aligning their course with Comm B learning outcomes? If so, why?

Most respondents reported having no difficulty aligning their course with Comm B learning outcomes. However, fifteen respondents (out of 101) did. Most of the reported difficulties had to do with finding class time and securing adequate TA resources to fulfill all of the Comm B instructional goals. As one respondent put it, "satisfying all of the requirements is a challenge both in terms of just fitting everything in logistically as well as the labor-intensive nature of the teaching, relative to most other courses." The challenges are:

i. **Fitting in oral presentations.** Several instructors noted the difficulty of "wedging" oral communication activities, especially student presentations, into limited class time while also giving adequate focus to course content (e.g., "The oral component is the one that causes the most logistical nightmares"). In-class presentations, the most common form of graded speaking activity in Comm B courses, can occupy two to five hours of class time (e.g., 25 students x 10 minutes each = 4+ hours), narrowing the time available for other instruction and activities.

ii. **Needing more time and a smaller student-to-instructor ratio to provide adequate writing instruction.** Several instructors noted the extraordinary amount of time and labor involved in Comm B writing instruction. Direct instruction, peer review, and other writing activities take significant time in class, and offering productive feedback on multiple writing assignments and drafts, whether by writing careful comments or conferring with individual students, takes significant time outside of class. Lecturers who teach large-enrollment Comm B courses face particular challenges as writing instructors (e.g., "The Comm B course I have taught is a large

4 The criteria listed on the survey allow for "equivalent speaking activities" as alternatives to formal presentations. In some courses the assessment of student speaking may have been folded into a general participation grade, making it "hard," as one respondent put it, "to quantify the number of opportunities [for graded oral communication]."
lecture, which makes it hard to really do the writing process justice"). Several respondents lamented the prohibitively high number of students per instructor and desired more TA support.

iii. **Meeting the learning needs of non-native English speakers.** A few respondents noted how the Comm B learning outcomes were hard to achieve or placed an extraordinary burden on instructors because of some non-native speakers' need for extra instruction in basic English-language skills.

3. **Do instructors perceive Comm B courses as helping students achieve the Comm B learning outcomes?**

Yes. Overwhelmingly, instructors believe these courses help students achieve the desired outcomes. We asked instructors to "reflect on [their] impression of students' performance" by estimating what portion of their students at the end of the course could perform the four essential Comm B learning outcomes. In at least 90% of Comm B courses, "all" or "most" students, according to instructors, ended up able to perform each of these skills (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Instructors' impressions of student success in achieving essential Comm B learning outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>skill</th>
<th>all students ended up able to</th>
<th>most students ended up able to</th>
<th>half of students ended up able to</th>
<th>less than half of students ended up able to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. identify and make skillful use of relevant, reliable, and high-quality research sources appropriate to the course subject and discipline</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. make productive use of the writing process to develop a fledging idea into a formal paper, presentation, or project</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. produce formal writing and oral presentations that are clear, persuasive, well-organized, and polished</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. make proper use of expressive conventions and protocols appropriate to the genres of communication relevant to the course subject or discipline</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents' comments reinforce these encouraging results. Over a quarter of respondents added comments testifying to the success of their course and the conspicuous instructional payoff of Comm B's pedagogical priorities (e.g., "it is by far the course where I saw my student grow the most. The required emphasis on writing and presenting was a major benefit to my students"). Here is a sampling of their comments:

- I can say with confidence that I feel every student who has taken my class over the years improved their writing and speaking skills as outlined in the objectives.
- The overwhelming majority of students (45 out of 50) have made significant progress in learning to write effective [analytical papers], formulate research questions, conduct research, analyze their results and develop an effective presentation.
- Students are often poorly-prepared for the desired learning goals, so they are not able to make as much progress by the end of the semester as I would like, but they all make significant progress and are much improved in their research, writing, and speaking skills by the end of the semester.
- On the whole, the students improved enormously.
- Obviously, there are always outliers, but most students come out of the back end of the course with considerable improvements to their composition, oral, and research skills.
- The vast majority of students are clearly meeting outcomes.
- I saw tremendous growth in all of these areas over the course of the semester.

When we focus on the courses that provide the majority (60%) of Comm B credit, we see that instructors were again confident that at least half – but far more frequently, most or all – of their students achieved proficiency in the Comm B learning outcomes. Table 2 shows data for nine (out of ten) these courses, or 55% of the total Comm B credit:

---

5 Commenters were quick to note that students typically entered the class with widely varying skill levels and that many students entered with alarmingly weak skills, compounding the challenge of helping all students become proficient in the core Comm B skills by the end of the term. Only one respondent expressed doubts about the efficacy of Comm B instruction. The Communication Liaison will follow up with instructors who indicated that half or fewer than half of their students ended up able to achieve any of the learning outcomes.
Table 2. Instructor impressions of student proficiency in Comm B learning outcomes (LO) in the largest Comm B courses (by percentage of all Comm B credit)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>% of all Comm B credit awarded</th>
<th>portion of students who achieve proficiency in LO 1 (research)</th>
<th>portion of students who achieve proficiency in LO 2 (writing process)</th>
<th>portion of students who achieve proficiency in LO 3 (formal writing and oral presentations)</th>
<th>portion of students who achieve proficiency in LO 4 (expressive conventions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bio 152</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism 201</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPD 397</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psych 225</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eng 201</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>no response</td>
<td>no response</td>
<td>no response</td>
<td>no response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geog 101</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geog 101</td>
<td></td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm Arts 272</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;E Soc 210</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;E Soc 210</td>
<td></td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm Arts 262</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm Arts 262</td>
<td></td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm Arts 266</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table reveals that most or all students in 100% of the courses for which we have data achieved proficiency in Learning Outcome 1 (research); most or all students in 100% of the courses achieved proficiency in Learning Outcome 2 (writing process); most or all students in 90% of the courses achieved proficiency in Learning Outcome 3 (formal writing and oral presentations); and most or all students in 100% of the courses achieved proficiency in Learning Outcome 4 (expressive conventions). These results suggest the overall effectiveness of Comm B courses in helping students meet the desired learning outcomes.

---

6 EPD 397 data comes from EPD’s direct measurement of student performance on specific EPD 397 assignments in the Biomedical Engineering (BME) Program (Fall 2014).

7 Eng 201 is taught by TAs, who were not surveyed.
4. The survey asked instructors to share their plans for revising their course and to share their suggestions for, as well as concerns about, the future of Comm B courses generally.

a. Do instructors and departments plan to revise their Comm B courses? How?

A notable portion of respondents reported that they or their departments plan to revise their Comm B course by offering it as a summer course (12%) and/or putting it partially or fully online (17%).

Only a handful of respondents explained how they planned to meet the challenge of redesigning a 15-week Comm B course, with its unique instructional demands, for the compressed summer schedule. One indicated that a summer version of the course would feature "less reading, more interaction [and] shorter writing assignments." Another indicated that "the compressed format will mean we can’t read long books as we do during the semester." Another reported that some Comm B activities would be shifted online (i.e., "oral presentations will be given online, which will actually make it easier to for the students to critique themselves and each other. Discussions will be in chat rooms rather than live"). Respondents did not assess whether the pedagogical advantages of such adaptations outweigh the potential disadvantages.

Respondents specified a number of ways they plan to adapt (or have already adapted) their instruction for partially or fully online versions of their course:
- giving more individual and small-group digital media assignments such as video essays, multimodal presentations, and blog postings that require students to do online writing and/or speaking
- asking students to write a "concept paper" for a multimedia project and discussing it with them before and as they work on it (e.g., brainstorming with students at various stages of development of the project as with a scholarly research paper project)
- shifting reader-response and other regularized discussion to digital arenas, including social media (e.g., Twitter)
- having small students groups co-produce video documentaries for their final projects
- incorporating online face-to-face conferencing to facilitate more one-on-one interactions with the instructor and promote more group interactions among students.

b. Which campus resources do Comm B instructors use?

By far, the Writing Center and the research workshops led by library staff are the resources most frequently used by Comm B instructors. Almost three quarters of Comm B instructors refer their students to the Writing Center and slightly more than half rely on the research workshops. It is not clear whether instructors rely on the Writing Center to help improve the writing of all of their students or only the weakest writers (e.g., "I refer students with basic writing skill problems to the Writing Center").
Relatively few Comm B instructors make use of other campus resources such as the Writing Fellows Program (21%), Learning Support Services (15%), Writing Across the Curriculum (13%), online research tutorials such as Sift & Winnow (8%), or Design Lab (6%). There are several factors that may explain this relatively low use: instructors may not be aware of these resources (as some respondents confirmed in their comments); instructors may wish to teach research and writing skills themselves (or have their TAs teach these skills); a course’s emphasis on oral communication may obviate the need for outside resources for writing instruction; and the instructor’s department may provide equivalent resources (e.g., the History Department’s History Lab).

c. Do instructors support including digital media and/or digital communication skills in the Comm B learning outcomes?

The survey defined "digital media/communication skills" as "skills necessary for creating video essays, graphic essays, interactive posters, radio documentaries, etc." In response to the question, "Should Comm B learning outcomes include digital media or digital communication skills?," 64% of respondents answered "no"; 19% answered "yes"; and 18% answered "no opinion." The nineteen respondents who answered "yes" were spread evenly between science fields and non-science fields.

Twenty-seven respondents added explanatory comments. From these comments, it is clear that most instructors agree that digital media/communication skills are valuable and that students should learn them. The question is whether these skills should, or even can, be taught in Comm B classes. Those who think they should be included argue that such skills are important for success in the job market (e.g., "when students get into job market, most likely they will be asked to give a job talk by means of ppt. presentation. For that purpose, perhaps it is good to give them the training needed"). Faculty who are amenable to including digital media/communication outcomes generally favored including these outcomes as optional "addons" to the current requirements or favored a flexible requirement where instructors choose from a buffet of possible communication skills, including digital media/communication skills, to emphasize.

Only a handful of commenters supported a mandate—that is, a firm requirement across all Comm B courses—to teach digital media/communication skills. In contrast, a third of the commenters felt that such a mandate would dangerously compromise other Comm B instruction by diverting instructional attention from it. As one respondent put it, "Expanding to include the multiple digital media skills will dilute activity leading to improved oral and written skills." Some respondents, while not opposed to encouraging interested teachers to offer such instruction, felt strongly that "teaching basic research, critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills should come first." Even respondents who granted the vocational importance of digital skills noted the continuing priority of traditional writing and speaking skills for the job market (e.g., "interpersonal communication and writing skills are still the number one thing that many employers desire and say is lacking in job candidates").
Some respondents resisted including digital media and communication skills among the Comm B learning outcomes for other reasons. Several felt that instruction in digital media/communication skills didn't fit the communication protocols of their discipline (e.g., "it would be great for some classes, but really wouldn't fit in mine at all"), while some felt that students already received adequate instruction in other courses (e.g., "We teach these skills in the upper level classes, so it would be redundant"). Finally, some faculty felt ill-equipped by training or temperament to teach these skills.

d. Do instructors have additional recommendations for improving Comm B instruction?

Respondents offered two additional recommendations for improving Comm B instruction:

i. **Maintain appropriate class size and student-to-instructor ratio.** Many Comm B lecturers indicated that they felt incapacitated by the high number of students in their course. Many felt that instructional success was "closely related to availability of TAs and class size," and some noted that the student-to-TA ratio in their courses had significantly surpassed the 20:1 recommended in the Comm B course criteria. To address this, many instructors proposed adding TAs. A sampling of their comments reveals these instructors' frustration with large class sizes and course staffing plans:

- *Many students need more assistance than I or my TAs are able to provide, given the number of students we are each responsible for. I try to alleviate the workload for my TAs by doing a lot of grading, but they are still far from having time to bring the weaker students to the level described above. ... I think the [Comm B] goals are great, but the student-TA ratio (40-1 in my case) make them unrealistic. In my mind, we could actually accomplish these goals with a ratio of 15-1.*

- *The learning outcomes of Comm B courses are entirely dependent upon the availability of TAs and the size of the class. The course I teach had an enrollment of 120 students with 3 TAs 10 years ago, now I have only one TA and therefore can only allow an enrollment of about 30 for efficient training. ... My ideal number would be an enrollment of 45 students with 2 TAs.*

- *As enrollments have increased and TA resources decreased, it is harder to fairly and thoroughly assess all material in a Comm B course. ... Dedicated TA lines to Comm B courses would be amazing.*

- *Given budgetary cuts, it has been questioned as to whether the course is well-suited for a Comm B designation ... [since I am] stretched thin when it comes to assessment.*

- *I am no longer able to teach the course as a Comm B because of enrollment. This semester there were 50 students, and prior semesters have had 60 to 110 students. I would LOVE to provide more feedback, but cannot do it given the minimum enrollment requirements that have been imposed.*

ii. **Special compensation for Comm B instructors.** Several respondents noted that special compensation for instructors who frequently teach Comm B courses would encourage the development of new Comm B courses and reinforce instructors'...
commitment to regularly teach and update Comm B courses, which "take a substantial amount of extra time to prepare and deliver to students."

Limitations of this Study

A. Compliance. Bubbled survey responses may not offer a complete picture of how courses meet or fail to meet the formal Comm B course requirements, and respondents' explanatory comments suggest that some of the seeming compliance shortfalls may not reflect actual instructional deficits. For example, the bubbled responses suggest that in 17% of Comm B courses, instructors fell short in grading the requisite number of oral communication activities. However, this does not necessarily mean that these courses failed to provide adequate instruction in or assessment of speaking skills. In one History course, to take just one example, "students give two oral presentations. The first is technically ungraded, but students receive the same evaluation and feedback that they receive for the graded, second presentation." Likewise, the bubbled responses suggest that students in 6% of courses are not receiving the required amount of feedback on their writing, but these responses may not accurately reflect how much feedback students in fact receive. One respondent noted this mismatch: "In terms of revision, I answered 1 in reference to the first draft of their paper. But they also get feedback at a number of other stages of the research process with the expectation that it is incorporated into their writing. So the answer could be 4, depending on how you want to count it." In short, these and other courses may fulfill the spirit, but not the letter, of the Comm B requirements.

B. Effectiveness. The survey was not designed to illuminate the relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness of specific Comm B instructional practices. It did not aim, that is, to identify specific correlations between particular Comm B teaching activities, emphases, or formats, on the one hand, and students' level of success in achieving each of the four core Comm B learning outcomes, on the other. Rather, the survey assessed if, and to what extent, Comm B faculty and staff perceive their courses to be helping students achieve the Comm B learning outcomes. However, because the survey did not query TAs, who do most or all of the actual Comm B instruction and assessment in many large-enrollment courses, some respondents could not answer questions about student learning. The faculty program director of a large Comm B course taught exclusively by TAs, for example, left her survey answers blank, explaining: "I would need to survey all instructors to get a sense of how to answer these questions for the aggregate." Likewise, a few lecturers noted that they were guessing about student proficiency rates (e.g., "I don't grade the papers so I do not have direct knowledge about this. You need to ask the TAs").
Conclusions

1. Course alignment with Comm B criteria and outcomes. Most Comm B courses align satisfactorily with the formal expectations for Comm B instruction.
   a. Sixty-three Comm B courses (listed in Appendix, point 1) meet the criteria and are structured and taught in a manner consistent with supporting the learning outcomes.
   b. Thirty Comm B courses (listed in Appendix, point 2) require additional discussion to ensure that they meet the criteria and are structured and taught in a manner consistent with supporting the learning outcomes. These include 16 courses for which we did not receive a survey response or received an incomplete one.
   c. Five departments teaching Comm B courses (listed in Appendix, point 3) must present evidence to show that these courses support the learning outcomes despite a high student-to-instructor ratio. See Recommendation III.9.

2. The value of Comm B learning outcomes. Comm B faculty overwhelmingly agree that the Comm B learning outcomes and course requirements are valuable and that all UW-Madison undergraduates should learn the core communication and research skills emphasized in Comm B courses. Faculty are divided, however, about whether to incorporate digital media and communication learning outcomes. See Recommendation II.6.

3. Difficulties meeting Comm B learning outcomes.
   a. The most common difficulty Comm B instructors reported in meeting Comm B outcomes was incorporating oral communication activities into their course design. See Recommendation I.1.
   b. Some instructors felt that improving Comm B teaching and learning depended less on developing new instructional strategies, requirements, and formats than on decreasing class size or otherwise ensuring an appropriate instructor-to-student ratio to meet the extraordinary demands of Comm B instruction. Many proposed addressing this by increasing the number of TAs. See Recommendation III.9.

4. The effectiveness of Comm B courses. According to faculty instructors, Comm B courses are, with very few exceptions, successful in helping most or all students achieve all of the Comm B learning outcomes. See Recommendation III.7.

Recommendations

I. Easy Interventions. The survey revealed several challenges facing Comm B instructors that can be met relatively easily by the Communication Liaison and the UGEC Chair.
   1. Provide more guidance about the oral communication requirement.
      a. Comm B instructors need more guidance about alternate ways to fulfill the oral communication requirement. The UGEC document, "Strategies for Integrating Oral Communication into the Comm-B Course," describes several alternatives to formal
presentations. The Chair of the UGEC will send this document to all Comm B instructors at the start of each year.

b. Instructors who struggle to fit two or more in-class presentations into limited class time should receive guidance from the Communication Liaison about how to shift presentations (and related practice and feedback) online. Video presentations are a professionally valuable and increasingly popular mode of oral communication. Instructors who choose to explore this option will need technical guidance and support.

2. **Familiarize instructors with campus resources that support Comm B instruction.** The UGEC Chair's letter sent to Comm B instructors each year should include a description of these resources. The list should include resources that will guide Comm B instructors in helping students who struggle with basic English meet the Communication learning outcomes.

3. **Develop a Comm B "community of practice" by holding an annual meeting for Comm B instructors.** The Communication Liaison should hold a welcome meeting each September for new and experienced Comm B instructors who will teach a Comm B course that year. In the meeting, modeled on the Writing Fellows Program's faculty orientation meeting, Comm B instructors can share course design ideas, instructional experiences, and successful teaching and troubleshooting strategies.

4. **Provide guidance and monitoring of summer Comm B instruction.** Given departments' widening interest in offering summer Comm B courses, instructors will need guidance to ensure that their new or redesigned courses meet Comm B learning outcomes and course criteria. The compressed 3-week, 4-week, or 8-week summer schedule poses unique challenges because Comm B pedagogy requires sufficient time for students to develop and practice various skills over multiple assignments, draft and revise their work, and have multiple opportunities to get graded and ungraded feedback on their writing and speaking. Instructors designing summer Comm B courses, with limited time between classes, will need guidance to ensure that students meet all of the Comm B learning outcomes. To provide such guidance:
   i. each spring, the Communication Liaison should convene instructors who will teach a Comm B course over the summer. At this meeting, new and experienced summer Comm B instructors can discuss ways to meet the unique challenges of designing and teaching a summer Comm B course.
   ii. the UGEC Chair should notify instructors who plan to offer a 3-week or 4-week summer Comm B course for the first time to consult with the Communication Liaison at the start of the spring semester to ensure that the compressed course design is viable.

5. **Create an e-handbook for Comm B instructors.** This handbook, assembled by the Communication Liaison, would include sample syllabi, activities, and advice provided by experienced Comm B instructors, including summer and online instructors, and additional information provided by the Communication Liaison and UGEC Chair.

**II. Provisional recommendations for discussion by the UGEC Working Group**

December 2016
6. **Including digital media and communication outcomes.** A small, focused committee should be convened to discuss possible revisions related to digital media and “flexibility” in the Comm B criteria. The inclusion of digital media or communication outcomes could take the form of an optional alternative or a mandated addition to the current outcomes. The optional alternative might look like this: "Students must produce formal writing and oral presentations that are clear, persuasive, well-organized, and polished. They may substitute suitable digital projects for oral presentations." The mandated addition would also require a change to the Comm B requirements and might look like this: "Students must produce formal writing, oral presentations, and suitable digital projects that are clear, persuasive, well-organized, and polished."

Incorporating digital media and communication activities, assignments, and skills—that is, activities, assignments, and skills that harness the creative capacities, rhetorical affordances, and pedagogical rewards of working with multimedia software and digital platforms may require substantial changes in course design or instruction style. Further discussion is needed to determine whether a) the pedagogical yield of such activities and assignments is great enough to warrant their being allowed to substitute for more traditional expository writing or oral communication activities and assignments; and b) digital communication activities and assignments are likely to deflect needed attention and time from writing and oral communication instruction. A fuller description of digital media and communication activities, including multimodal writing assignments (i.e., assignments that combine images, audio, and text), should anchor this discussion.

If digital media and communication outcomes are included in Comm B outcomes, Comm B instructors must receive adequate training and support in the required technology, and this technology must be accessible to all students.

**III. Recommendations for further study.**

7. **Student learning across Comm B courses.** Further study is needed to triangulate and verify faculty impressions of students' success in meeting the Comm B learning outcomes. Such a study should align with the implementation of the UGEC assessment plan and engage in direct assessment of students’ communication knowledge, skills, and values.

8. **Summer Comm B courses.** An administrative assessment of summer Comm B courses will need to be done to determine whether instructors' adaptations to meet the unique demands of summer courses consistently fulfill the Comm B course criteria and preserve the goals and effectiveness of Comm B teaching.

9. **Comm B course size and student-to-instructor ratio.** Some departments may need to calibrate their class sizes and TA workloads to support Comm B instruction. The criteria clearly state that the recommended ratio for students to instructor is 20:1, and if the ratio is higher than that, departments have to demonstrate how the objectives and requirements of the course can be satisfied within the larger format. For those courses listed in the Appendix, point 3, departments should provide evidence that there is an appropriate balance between instructors and students.
10. **English language learners.** Some faculty noted a "disconnect" between Comm B expectations and students who struggle with basic English skills. The Communication Committee should follow up by consulting with those faculty and gathering data on English language learners' success in Comm B courses. An analysis might pay particular attention to Comm B courses more frequently taken by students who completed Comm A via ESL to determine if more support or smaller sections for those courses are needed.

IV. Long-term investments in Comm B: interventions that require funding

11. **Support for one dedicated Comm B Education Innovation Grant or course release per year.** Departments would apply for such an award on behalf of instructors who regularly teach Comm B courses and who wish to perform a major redesign of an existing Comm B course. Several respondents noted that a course release was needed to give instructors sufficient time to plan a major course redesign, including creating an online version of an existing course. Such a course release could be awarded through a special Comm B application process (e.g., a Comm B Education Innovation Grant).

12. **Explore new formal structures for teaching oral communication** – ideally, an "oral communication across the curriculum" program or support center. Better support for oral communication instruction might be achievable by assembling a curated set of core teaching resources provided to one or more departments that prioritize oral communication.
Appendix:
Comm B Course Calibration

1. These Comm B courses meet the Comm B criteria and are structured and taught in a manner consistent with supporting the learning outcomes:

ANTHRO 352 Ancient Tech and Invention
ART HIST 227 The Ends of Modernism
ASIAN AM, SOC 220 Ethnic Movements in U.S.
BIOOGY, BOTANY, ZOOLOGY 152 Introductory Biology
BIOCORE 381 Evolution, Ecology, & Genetics
BIOCORE 382 Evol, Ecol, & Genetics Lab
BIOCORE 384 Cellular Biology Laboratory
BOTANY 330 Algae
C&E SOC, SOC 210 Survey of Sociology
COM ARTS 272 Intro-Interpersonal Com
COM ARTS 266 Thry & Pract-Group Discussion
CS&D 481 Undergraduate Junior Honors
COUN PSY 650 Theory & Prac-Interviewing
CURRIC 277 Videogames & Learning
CURRIC 315 Rdg & Wrtg in Early Childhood
CURRIC 369 The Teaching of Language Arts
CURRIC 305 Tchg Rdg & Other Lang Arts
CURRIC 318 Teaching Reading and Writing
CURRIC, JEWISH 515 Holocaust: Hist, Memory & Educ
CSCS 130 Community Newswriting
DANCE 200 Writing the Moving Body
ENGL, THEATRE 120 Intro-Theatre & Dramatic Lit
ENGL 140 Comm B Topics in English Lit
ENGL 162 Shakespeare
ENGL 201 Intermediate Composition
ENGL 207 Intro to Creative Writing
ENGL 236 Bascom Course
ENVIR ST, F&W ECOL 515 Natural Resources Policy
FOLKLORE 100 Introduction to Folklore
FOOD SCI 603 Senior Seminar
E P D 397 Technical Communication
GEOG 101 Intro to Human Geography
GERMAN 236 Bascom Seminar
GERMAN 270 Language & Immigration in Wisc
HISTORY 200 Historical Studies
HISTORY 201 The Historian's Craft
ILS 200 Critical Thinking & Expressn
ILS, RELIG ST 234 Genres-Westrn Relig Writing
JEWISH, MUSIC 319 Topics in Music & Ethnicity-US
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JEWISH 356</td>
<td>Jerusalem: Conflict &amp; Desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURN 201</td>
<td>Intro to Mass Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINES 355</td>
<td>Soc-Cult of Phys Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINES 457</td>
<td>Med Probs-Exercise &amp; Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINES 521</td>
<td>Physical Activity and Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KINES 600</td>
<td>Advanced Exercise Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURN 176</td>
<td>Spec Topics in Mass Comm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAND ARC 551</td>
<td>Senior Project in Land Arc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L I S 201</td>
<td>The Information Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L I S 340</td>
<td>Topics in Information Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINGUIS 236</td>
<td>Bascom Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 203</td>
<td>19&amp;20 C Russian Lit Tran I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 204</td>
<td>19&amp;20 C Russian Lit Tran II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 209</td>
<td>Masterpieces-Fr Lit &amp; Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 236</td>
<td>Bascom Crse-In Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 255</td>
<td>Lt Trn:Boccaccios Decameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 271</td>
<td>Scand LitTran:Mid Ages-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 274</td>
<td>Scand Lit in Tran-20th C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTRANS 275</td>
<td>In Trans:Hans C. Andersen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L SC COMM 111</td>
<td>Sci&amp;Technology Newswriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L SC COMM 212</td>
<td>Intro-Scientific Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L SC COMM 360</td>
<td>Information Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L SC COMM 560</td>
<td>Scientific Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICROBIO 551</td>
<td>Physiol Dvrsty-Procryot Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NURSING 319</td>
<td>Nurs Care-Inpatient Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILOS 341</td>
<td>Contemporary Moral Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PORTUG 361</td>
<td>Portuguese Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYCH 225</td>
<td>Research Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP &amp; SE 479</td>
<td>Lang&amp;Readng: Learn&amp;Behav Disab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP &amp; SE 501</td>
<td>Rehab-Cnslg Psych: Applicatn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC 181</td>
<td>Hnrs Smr:Sociolgl Enterprse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. These Comm B courses require additional discussion to ensure that they meet the criteria and are structured and taught in a manner consistent with supporting the learning outcomes.

a. Courses for which we have completed surveys:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASTRON 236</td>
<td>History of Matter in the Universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHEM 346</td>
<td>Intmed Organic Chem Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASSICS 320</td>
<td>The Greeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E ASIAN, RELIG ST 235</td>
<td>Genres-Asian Religious Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECON 580</td>
<td>Honors-Research Proj Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 181</td>
<td>First-Year Honors Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 307</td>
<td>Creatv Wrtng:Fic&amp;PoetWkshp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMAN 267</td>
<td>Yiddish Song and Jewish Exp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b. Courses for which no survey response was submitted or the survey response was incomplete:
   i. No survey response or syllabus was submitted for the following courses. During followup, the department indicated the designation may be removed from the course, and course change proposals were initiated to do so.
      CURRIC  313  Lang & Lit-Secondary Curric
      HISTORY  533  Multi-Racial Soc:Latin Amer
      LCA      236  Bascom Course* (The department is undergoing a large renumbering process this spring, and the designation will be removed as part of that process)
   ii. Survey response was incomplete:
       CHICLA, HISTORY 245       Chicana and Latina History

3. Departments teaching these Comm B courses must present evidence to show that they support the learning outcomes despite a high student-to-instructor ratio:
   AFRICAN     201 Intro-African Lang and Lit
   ATM OCN, ENVIR ST 171 Global Chg: Atmospheric Iss
   CLASSICS    322 The Romans
   COM ARTS    262 Thry&Pract-Argument&Debate
   CNSR SCI    360 Socially Just Consumption
12 May 2017

To: Steve Cramer, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, Co-Chair HLC Advisory Committee
    Jocelyn Milner, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
    Anja Wanner, Professor of English and Co-Chair, HLC Advisory Committee

From: Elaine M. Klein, Associate Dean and Director, University General Education

Re: University General Education Committee Affirmation of UW-Madison Mission

XC: John Karl Scholz, Dean, College of Letters & Science

The University General Education Committee was recently asked to consider a question presented in the course of discussions about UW-Madison’s decennial accreditation, concerning the extent to which the university’s 1988 mission statement maintains its currency today, and if so, how “General Education” is located relative to that mission. Members reviewed the mission and enthusiastically endorsed it not only as “current,” but as an excellent summary of what UW-Madison does in all of its dimensions as our faculty and staff teach students at the undergraduate, graduate, professional, and post-graduate levels; create new knowledge through research and innovation; and serve society in a long tradition that starts with our campus community, city, and state and expands well beyond those boundaries.

The goals of UW-Madison’s General Education program, and the courses that meet the requirements, align well with the institution’s mission. General Education draws upon and reinforces broad and balanced educational programs at the undergraduate level. Courses in the arts and humanities and in the social sciences strengthen students’ cultural understanding and the ability to consider the implications of social, political and economic change; courses in biological, physical, and computer sciences, and in technology studies, engineering, and design encourage students to weigh, too, the implications of scientific and technological change. Courses that meet the Ethnic Studies Requirement focus explicitly on “respect for, and commitment to, the ideals of a pluralistic, multiracial, open and democratic society.” The committee is committed to excellence in General Education: to support this excellence, faculty and staff from schools and colleges that serve undergraduates, and from administrative units that support their success, serve on the committee and actively provide oversight for the curriculum and assessment of student learning in it.

Though the university’s aspirations were articulated nearly 30 years ago, the goals and values expressed therein continue to resonate with our modern sensibilities. From adoption of the AACU’s “Essential Learning Outcomes for Liberal Education” as a framework for discussing the goals of higher education, to understanding excellence through assessing and improving student learning, to describing our sense of the coherent whole that is the Wisconsin Experience, this mission is alive and well, and is supported by the UW-Madison General Education program.

On April 14, 2017, the UW-Madison General Education Committee was pleased to consider the question raised, and on May 12, unanimously affirmed this statement. Please feel free to contact me if I or the UGEC can be of any further assistance.