Progress in Implementing the General Education Requirements

Report to the University Academic Planning Committee
December 18, 1997

At its meeting on November 21, 1996, the University Academic Planning Committee assigned the overall academic administration of the campus-wide General Education Requirements to the College of Letters and Science to act as trustee on behalf of all schools and colleges. In fulfilling this role, L&S offers this report as a summary of the efforts undertaken in support of the General Education Requirements during the current academic year.

**Administrative support**

Assistant Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson was appointed Director of Undergraduate Education within L&S to serve both College needs and the broader needs of general education on campus. This assignment is a natural outgrowth of Dean Westphal's experience in managing teaching assistant and summer sessions budgets.

**Assessment**

Professor Joel Robbins of the Mathematics Department has been appointed to coordinate assessment efforts for the Quantitative Reasoning Requirements. Professor Denise Solomon of the Communication Arts department has been appointed to coordinate assessment efforts for the Communication Requirements.

**Work in Conjunction with Newly Established Committees**

This fall we established two new committees related to General Education. The first committee is the Letters and Science General Education Committee, made up of faculty and staff members from across the College with Vice Chancellor Robert Skloot serving as an ex officio member. In addition to general faculty representatives, the committee includes representatives from the Implementation Committees, the L&S Curriculum Committee, L&S Student Academic Affairs, and the Writing Center. Much of this committee’s work thus far has been focused on fully integrating the Communication and Quantitative Reasoning requirements into the curricular and academic life of the institution, and in helping to increase the number of Communication B spaces. Among the current and planned activities of the committee are the following:

- Sending a mass emailing to over 8,000 freshmen and sophomores just prior to the spring semester registration period reminding them of the General Education Requirements, particularly Comm A and B and QR A and B, and encouraging them to seek advising as needed.
- Planning for a General Education web site as a resource for faculty, staff, and students. The web site would be linked to the Timetable and the “official” Communication and Quantitative Reasoning course lists maintained by the Office of Budget Planning and Analysis. For students, this site would provide basic and detailed information on the
requirements and how they can be met. For faculty and instructional staff, this web site would include information on course criteria and proposing courses. It would also provide a great deal of information now contained in the “Sourcebook” for Communication B instructors which provides tips for incorporating writing in the classroom, sample syllabi, etc.

- Planning for a survey of Letters and Science departments concerning their role in providing Quantitative Reasoning and Communication courses for students. Apart from information-gathering, a primary purpose of this survey will be to emphasize the very important role such courses are expected to play in our curriculum at both the College and department levels.

- Working with Professor Jim Sweet of the UW Madison Survey Center on the inclusion in the 1998 Student Satisfaction Survey of several questions related to the larger issues of general education.

- Planning an analysis of courses required/recommended by various programs on campus that have now become Communication B courses. We plan to contact these programs and departments to ask that they review whether the requirement/recommendation is still pertinent given the Communication B designation. The purpose of this is to ensure that Communication B course places be available to students seeking to fulfill that requirement to the greatest extent possible while recognizing that students opting to take a Communication B course may be doing so for a variety of reasons unrelated to the Communication B status.

- On-going consideration of how course prerequisites should be applied vis-a-vis the Communication A and B and Quantitative Reasoning A and B courses.

The second committee established is the General Education Requirements Technical Working Group. This group is composed of members from various administrative offices on campus concerned with aspects of implementing these requirements. The work of this group during the current semester has included the following:

- Considering the difficulties of implementing Communication and Quantitative Reasoning designations below the course level and determining an interim method for handling this.

- Undertaking contact with the ISIS implementation groups (PeopleSoft project) to ensure that the new student information system incorporates features important to the implementation and support of the General Education Requirements.

- Reviewing various technical aspects of implementation thus far. This resulted specifically in requesting that a few details of the Quantitative Reasoning implementation be clarified for Admissions and for the DARS system.

- Beginning a review of various documents used to explain the GER to students with an eye to making them more effective and easier to understand.

- Building communication lines for technical issues related to GER, both long-term and as needed during Timetable building and registration periods.

- Beginning the planning of a “Handbook” for General Education; such a handbook may ultimately be incorporated in the web site discussed above.

Additional Support Work
We have also undertaken the following as support to the implementation of the GER:

- Establishing the “repository” of GER course records.
- Writing a summary of the Communication B instructor “self assessments” for use by various groups.
- Providing various analyses of number of seats/courses needed for implementation of the requirements.

**Recommended Reporting Procedures to the University Academic Planning Committee**

We recommend that the College report to the University Academic Planning Committee about the General Education Requirements on an annual basis each December. This informational report will include information about all courses tentatively approved by the Implementation Committees during the previous year. Approved courses and other policy components (clarifications, revisions in criteria, etc.) would be implemented on an interim basis throughout the year contingent on the annual final approval of the University Academic Planning Committee which retains the authority to prospectively mandate any changes to what has been recommended and implemented on an interim basis.

**Submitted by:**

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Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Assistant Dean and Director of Undergraduate Education, College of Letters and Science
Members of the L&S General Education Committee are as follows:

Professor Richard Brualdi, Chair, Department of Mathematics, also Chair, L&S Curriculum Committee and Chair, Quantitative Reasoning Subcommittee
Director Bradley Hughes, Writing Center
Associate Dean Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, Department of Communication Arts and L&S Administration
Professor Keith Kluender, Department of Psychology
Professor Robert March, Department of Physics and Director, ILS Program Asst. to the Assoc.
Dean Mark Matosian, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Director Greg Medina, Cross College Advising Service
Assistant Dean William Miller, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Professor Sherry Reames, Associate Chair, Department of English and Chair, Communications Implementation Committee
Associate Vice Chancellor Robert Skloot (ex officio)
Professor Denise Solomon, Department of Communication Arts and Coordinator for Assessing the Communication Requirements
Associate Dean Janet Vandevender, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Assistant Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson, L&S Director of Undergraduate Education, Chair

General Education Requirements Technical Working Group members are as follows:

Bruce Beck, Office of Budget Planning and Analysis
Ruth McNichols, Undergraduate Admissions
Sharon Pero, Office of the Registrar--Timetable and Course Scheduling Office
James Steele, Office of the Registrar
Char Tortorice, Testing and Evaluation
Nancy Westphal-Johnson, L&S Administration, Chair