

Report to the University Academic Planning Council

November 19, 1998

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

Policy item

At its meeting of December 18, 1997, the University Academic Planning Council affirmed the recommendation of the Communications Implementation Committee that students are expected to take only one of the basic courses that satisfy Part A of the Communication requirement (currently Ag Journ/Fam Comm 100, Comm Arts 100, EPD 155, English 100, English 118), and that students who take more than one such course will not receive additional degree credit.

Explanation: Since these courses have been deliberately designed to be as similar as possible, it would obviously be redundant to take more than one of them. But the policy needs to be official and explicit, to prevent students from wasting their time in this way.

That affirmation could not be acted upon since Integrated Liberal Studies was at that time also listed as a Communication A course but, unlike the other Communication A courses, carried breadth designation as a humanities course. This prevented implementation at that time. ILS 200 has now been designated as a Communication B course effective fall semester 1998-99, and no longer counts for Communication A credit. The Council is asked to reaffirm that students should receive degree credit for only one of the following Communication A courses: Ag Journ/Fam Comm 100, Comm Arts 100, EPD 155, English 100, English 118.

Annotation 1/13/00: See report of 12/16/99 to the University Academic Planning Council for follow-up on this item.

Administrative Support

The focus of our administrative efforts in General Education has continued to be the development of more Communication B courses. One of the driving forces behind this is the realization that many students will complete more than one Communication B course for a variety of sound academic reasons, and that we must adjust to this reality. The result of our recent efforts, funded totally by Letters and Science, is that we anticipate providing a total of something over 9,000 course spaces in Communication B courses in the 1998-99 academic year, excluding summer sessions. This is an increase of nearly 3,000 spaces over 1997-98. Although we are getting close to achieving what is needed in terms of Communication B course capacity, based on two Communication B courses per student, some of the seats we have created are temporary. These temporary seats are in very large, multi-lecture courses concentrated in a few departments.

Neither the administration of Letters and Science nor the departments wish to continue this arrangement indefinitely. For both financial and long-term pedagogical reasons, our focus must

now turn to encouraging the development of more faculty-taught, smaller Communication B courses.

We also continue to encourage the teaching of Communication B courses during the summer sessions, and have received support from the Division of Continuing Studies for this purpose.

As the implementation of the General Education requirements has evolved, a substantial part of Communication B instruction now involves teaching assistants, and we have wanted to ensure that these graduate students have the requisite skills for teaching writing. All Communication B teaching assistant appointments now include time for eight hours of training each semester in teaching writing. The Writing Across the Curriculum Program has taken the lead in providing instruction and offers training seminars each semester.

Assessment

Assessment of Quantitative Reasoning: Since 1990 the Quantitative Assessment Program (QAP) has investigated whether "emerging juniors" have the quantitative skills required for success in their upper division courses. It has done this by selecting eight to twelve upper division courses per year in various departments, soliciting the assistance of the faculty member teaching the course, designing (in concert with the faculty member) a test to measure whether the students in the course have the skills the faculty member expects, administering and grading the test, collecting various data on the students taking the test, preparing a report for each course examined, and disseminating the results. As a result of the effort the service departments (such as Math and Statistics) have gained a better understanding of what the client departments want and the client departments have gained a better understanding of what their students can do.

In 1995-96 the QAP expanded its role and began studying lower level courses. In 1996-97 the QAP expanded its role again and began assessing some courses which partially fulfill the UW's new general education quantitative reasoning requirement. The methodology used so far has been the pretest methodology explained above. (Faculty like this methodology because it gives them information about their students.) The methodology provides information about QR readiness at the beginning of the course and so might be used to assess the success of QR-A requirement. It is harder to assess QR-B. Possible methods include: embedded question post test methodology (hard to get faculty cooperation), post semester student interviews (expensive), statistical studies using ISIS (the relevant info may not be there), faculty focus groups and interviews.

See also the Quantitative Assessment Committee Annual Report, 1997-98, available from Professor Joel Robbin, Department of Mathematics.

Verbal Assessment: The Verbal Assessment Committee has developed a multi-year multifaceted plan to assess the General Education requirements in communication. The plan targets outcomes at three different points in an undergraduate's educational experience: (1) at the Comm-A course level, (2) at the Comm-B course level, and (3) just prior to graduation. At each of these levels, we expect to see General Education outcomes in the form of both skill development and beliefs and attitudes about oral communication, writing, and information management. Accordingly, a

series of studies has been scheduled to assess either skill or attitudinal outcomes at the various points in the undergraduate experience.

The first study, completed in the Spring of 1998, was an assessment of pre-graduation beliefs and attitudes about oral communication, writing, and information management. In addition, a variety of potential impediments to student learning were assessed. Because the sample for the study included students with 100 credit hours or more, this study establishes a baseline for senior attitudes among students who matriculated prior to the implementation of the General Education communication requirements. (It is important to realize, however, that many of the courses serving the General Education requirements were offered during this time period; thus, the baseline cohort may have had some exposure to General Education communication instruction.)

The second study is currently under development for implementation in the Spring of 1999. This effort will focus on a skills assessment of student performance at the end of their Comm-B course. The study will sample students enrolled in Comm-B courses, rather than particular courses, to support conclusions about the Comm-B course in general. Several course parameters will be measured in the study to provide insight into how variations in course enrollments, formats, assignments, etc. correlate with student outcomes.

Full details on the assessment plan and its development are provided in the 1997-98 Verbal Assessment Report available from Professor Denise Solomon, Department of Communication Arts.

Work of the Letters and Science General Education Committee and the General Education Technical Working Group

1. Survey of all Letters and Science departments: The L&S General Education Committee conducted a survey of all Letters and Science departments in February, 1998 concerning plans for developing Communication B courses, and alerting them to the urgent need to develop more courses and spaces in Communication B courses.

2. Library Component of Communication B: The L&S General Education Committee met with Abigail Loomis of the Library User Education Office concerning the library component of Communication B courses. This discussion led to a new plan for implementing the library component in Communication B courses. Ms. Loomis will work with Professor Denise Solomon who heads up the verbal assessment effort to identify what opportunities there are for library components in existing Communication B courses, keeping in mind that the library component does not necessarily mean a class session taught by librarians. While multiple section Communication B courses and Communication B courses with library assignments will be specially targeted for contact concerning the research component, the Library User Education Office will also work to make other Communication B course instructors aware of the library component of the requirement and consult with them as needed.

3. Issues related to the campus-wide implementation of the ISIS Project: In light of the impending ISIS implementation, both committees are giving consideration to the possibility of enforcing Communication A and Quantitative Reasoning A as pre-requisites for Communication

B and Quantitative Reasoning B courses, respectively, should the new system allow for this. There could be many unforeseen ramifications to enforcing such pre-requisites, and the matter needs to be studied closely should it be technically possible.

The General Education Technical Working Group has taken the initiative to work with ISIS technical staff to allow for identification of course attributes below the section level. This would alleviate many of the cumbersome aspects of the current system for identifying courses that carry Communication B credit only in one lecture or only for certain discussion sections. This level of flexibility in identifying Communication B courses on the part of departments and instructors has been key to successful implementation, but has presented complex technical problems.

4. Breadth designation for Bascom Courses (Course 236): It was brought to our attention that some students do not register for Bascom courses (course 236s) because they do not currently carry breadth designation as also counting for social studies or humanities credit. We have asked that the L&S Curriculum Committee work with departments in the humanities and social sciences to assign a breadth designation to their course 236s. Course 236 has not yet been approved by either the Physical Sciences or Biological Sciences Divisional Committees, so no physical or biological science courses are part of this consideration.

5. Communication with Students: The main objective in communicating with students is to ensure they are aware of the requirements themselves as well as the philosophy behind such requirements. During registration periods last year, freshmen and sophomore students were sent a mass e-mail concerning the General Education requirements. The official course list on the web has been revamped to be more user-friendly for students. Work on a General Education website has begun, but has been slowed by the press of other work. In the current academic year, we will be working to revise the Undergraduate Catalog and related publications to reflect the fact that the vast majority of the undergraduates on campus are now subject to the General Education requirements. We also plan to make special efforts to explain the General Education requirements to incoming freshmen at the SOAR Program, and to make sure that they are aware of various options in completing the requirements, such as the opportunities afforded by the Bascom Courses.

6. Communication with Faculty and Staff: Initial work on a General Education website has begun and material helpful to faculty and staff teaching General Education courses will be part of this website. The L&S General Education Committee plans to undertake in the spring semester a survey of departments across the university to determine whether Communication B course seats are being used effectively and efficiently. We will try to ascertain what courses undergraduate majors are taking to fulfill the Communication B requirement, and whether departments are requiring or recommending multiple courses that have now become Communication B courses for reasons unrelated to the General Education requirements.

7. Consideration of cut-off scores for Communication A course placement: The L&S General Education Committee reported to Associate Vice Chancellor Robert Skloot last spring concerning the reasons why exemption from the Communication A requirement should be continued at the level of exempting 25% of the incoming freshman class each year. Further discussion led to the cut-off score being set at the same actual level as was used in 1997-98. This

resulted in only a 20% exemption rate for the 1998-99 incoming freshman class, with more students needing to take Communication A than had originally been expected. Over the three year period since 1995-96, however, the overall exemption rate is 24.2%. We will continue to monitor and consider this issue.

8. Incorporation of General Education in retention databases: The General Education Technical Group held a joint meeting with the Data Needs Committee's Retention Team to discuss how general education courses could be incorporated into retention and longitudinal data views for the Info Access system.

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Assessment information provided by Professor Joel Robbin and Professor Denise Solomon

* Not attached in this on-line presentation.

Members of the Letters and Science General Education Committee

Richard Brualdi, Mathematics
Brad Hughes, Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum
Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, Communication Arts and L&S Administration
Keith Kluender, Psychology (1997-98)
Bob March, Physics and ILS
Mark Matosian, L&S Student Academic Affairs (1997-98)
Ken Mayer, Political Science (1998-99)
Greg Medina, Cross College Advising Service (1997-98)
Bill Miller, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Sherry Reames, English
Joel Robbin, Mathematics (1998-99)
Bob Skloot, Theatre and Drama and Provost's Office (ex officio)
Denise Solomon, Communication Arts
Janet Vandevender, L&S Student Academic Affairs (1997-98)
Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service (1998-99)
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Members of the General Education Technical Working Group

Bruce Beck, Budget Planning and Analysis
Ruth McNichols, Undergraduate Admissions
Bill Miller, L& S Student Academic Affairs
Sharon Pero, Registrar's Office-Timetable and Course Scheduling
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Char Tortorice, Testing and Evaluation
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Members of the Communications Implementation Committee

Patricia Becker, Nursing (1997-98)
Marion Brown, Agricultural Journalism
David Canon, Political Science (to begin January, 1999)
Michele Hilmes, Communication Arts (1997-98)
Sherry Reames, English, Chair
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