



College of Letters & Science
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

15 September 2020

TO: Karl M. Scholz, Provost
Jocelyn M. Milner, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

FROM: Elaine M. Klein, Associate Dean for Academic Planning and
Chair, University General Education Committee
Eric M. Wilcots, Dean

RE: Annual Report of the University General Education Committee

We are pleased to submit the annual report of the University General Education Committee. When this report was originally drafted for committee discussion in Spring 2020, the university and committee were required to respond urgently to extraordinary circumstances. Like so much of the “ordinary” work of the semester, this report was set aside, to be taken up only after ordinary work could resume. As a result, this is not the committee’s usual exhaustive point-by-point report: its contents reflect the disruption the world experienced last Spring.

In 2019-2020, the ordinary work of the University General Education Committee included many topics:

- Revisions were proposed (but not approved) for the descriptive criteria for courses that meet the Communication A and B requirement. Those revisions underscore the role diversity and inclusion play in effective communication and the importance of teaching in ways that are accessible to and inclusive of all students.
- Improvements to resources for instructors were proposed, specifically to promote oral communication skills for students. Most relevant to the Communication B course array, resources to support effective instruction in oral communication (e.g., teaching tips and tricks, technical support, rubrics to efficiently evaluate oral communication) would be available to all instructors, given the modern demand for effective oral communication across disciplines and levels of instruction.
- Continued discussion of incorporating General Education Learning Outcomes in course proposals and on course syllabi, to facilitate adoption of a broad assessment strategy using campus-supported online assessment tools. The “Direct Evidence of Student Learning” project, built on the AEFIS course evaluation platform, is expected to facilitate broader formative, summative, and program-wide assessment of the General Education program.

Office of the Dean, College of Letters & Science

Eric M. Wilcots, Dean 105 South Hall 1055 Bascom Mall Madison, WI 53706-1394
Office: 608-263-2303 Fax: 608-265-3564 dean@ls.wisc.edu www.ls.wisc.edu

- The Ethnic Studies Subcommittee, joined by instructors of courses that serve the Ethnic Studies Requirement, also discussed the DESL project, which is relevant to their interest in whether students are achieving ESR learning outcomes. The subcommittee continued its work to review and approve courses new to the ESR course array, with most of those approvals granted to elementary level courses, in support of the aspiration that students should meet the requirement early in their UW-Madison careers.
- The libraries in partnership with Communication-B instructors completed their three-year assessment project. During this project core research and information literacy outcomes were developed, a programmatic approach to assess the outcomes across the course array was implemented, and iterative curricular improvements have been made. The next phase will transition into normalizing the developed assessment plan as regular practice and library instruction staff will be supported via a community of practice.
- Brainstorming and consultation with the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning about how and where to assess students' *Wisconsin Experience*, with suggestions ranging from specific courses to integration points for curricular and co-curricular experiences.
- Once again, the UGEC sponsored the campus wide essay contest that focuses on undergraduate Liberal Education. This year, our winners reminded us that the liberal arts teach students how to think critically about the present and the past, so they can more vividly imagine the future. (To read excerpts of the winning essays, see <https://ls.wisc.edu/news/liberal-arts-study-eopens-paths-to-future/>.)
- Committee members also offered enthusiastic support for the Go Big Read project, discussing how courses across the academic divisions and initiatives in various support units could incorporate *Parkland* into conversations.

Finally, mindful of the observation shared by the Higher Learning Commission site evaluation team, in the 2019 Report of the Comprehensive Evaluation of UW-Madison, the committee began discussion of how the university might approach a review of the 26-year-old General Education program, to determine whether the course/credit requirements, learning outcomes, and program structure are able to meet the needs of current students.

For many of the items listed above, the committee's work was disrupted, postponed, and left incomplete; we hope to complete those projects in the coming year.

After Spring Break 2020, the committee's attention necessarily shifted to urgent questions related to the pandemic. In addition, L&S staff resources and expertise shifted to the need to support Continuity of Instruction (COI) operations, for General Education, L&S, and the university.

There were several areas where GER and COI intersect:

- Current policy stands that GER may not be completed with courses that were not taken on graded bases; with the establishment of a Pass/Fail grade invoked in a time of disruption, UGEC affirmed that those grades would be used to meet requirements. Academic Planning and Institutional Research, and the Office of the Registrar, have analyzed the SD/UD grading patterns, and found that students used that grading scheme strategically.

- Testing & Evaluation Services manages statewide Math and English Placement testing. These tests place students into appropriate levels for instruction; because students may place beyond courses that satisfy Communication and Quantitative Reasoning requirements, they are someone high stakes/high value, because those scores satisfy those requirements. Under ordinary circumstances, tests are administered in-person, under proctored conditions; under pandemic conditions, tests would be administered remotely, but with no readily available, reliable, secure, and affordable mechanism to allow for online testing with proctoring, the committee was asked to affirm that the scores could still be used to meet requirements. UGEC members also noted that many students were laboring under less than ideal testing conditions, and the usual practice of fielding timed tests could put students with poor connections, distracted environments, and other stressors at a disadvantage. UGEC members and liaisons agreed that under these unusual conditions, unproctored testing was a necessity, untimed tests were a kindness, and TES could be granted the latitude to make decisions to repeat testing in extraordinary cases.
- On a related note, TES, L&S, and UGEC members with the English as a Second Language program to resolve issues related to administration of the English as a Second Language Assessment Test. Like other placement tests, the ESLAT is usually proctored, timed, and may meet GER. Again, in the interest of serving students who might be laboring under difficult conditions, the committee endorsed administration of remotely delivered, unproctored, time-limited placement testing.

As readers of this report will know, the end of the Spring term did not bring an end to the challenge to deliver curriculum in a pandemic. Indeed, new challenges arose: Social upheaval and civic unrest in response to racial injustice an inequity have renewed and focused the call for UGER to better address topics of race in the US by expanding the Ethnic Studies Requirement. Departments across campus are taking up the question of how to incorporate issues of racial inequities and contested histories in their curricula, laying the groundwork for possible expansion of the Ethnic Studies curriculum in meaningful ways, connected to students' majors, degree programs, and areas of study. The Ethnic Studies Subcommittee is ready to advise and reflect, and to lead discussions about meaningful and practical expansion of the ESR requirement, with the goal of making a general recommendation for an implementable plan to UAPC in Spring 2021.

It remains to be said that the university as a whole is still working under extraordinary conditions. We anticipate that the UGEC will continue to be asked to respond to requests to accommodate changing conditions. We cannot anticipate every request, but just as we ask our students to be resilient, we and the committee are ready to do the best we can to respond.

If you have questions about this report, or wish to discuss it with the committee, please contact Associate Dean Elaine Klein (elaine.klein@wisc.edu).