

To: Linda Wright-Bower, Chair

Educational Policy Committee

From: General Education Subcommittee

Date: October 15, 1999

Re: Interim Report

Last spring, the Senate charged the General Education Committee with reviewing SD 98-26 (the "[Haw Proposal](#)") and reporting at the November Senate meeting. Holding two-hour meetings each week since the beginning of the semester, the GES discussed the Haw proposal and compared it with the present program ([Attachment I](#)) as well as with other proposals that were brought to the committee, one by Peter Iadicola and two by Jeanette Clausen ([Attachment II](#)). Both Haw and Iadicola propose that General Education be defined primarily by the traditional A&S disciplines, and that all courses in those disciplines count toward fulfillment of one of the designated GenEd areas. Both Haw and Iadicola would expand Area I (Foundation Skills), Haw by adding a Computer Literacy requirement; Iadicola by adding a requirement in Non-Quantitative Reasoning. The Clausen proposals recommend maintaining the current approach to GenEd, with approved courses assigned to broadly defined areas (rather than discipline-defined areas); changes to the current program are proposed based on criticisms received from departments. The committee's deliberations focused on what kind of GenEd program will serve IPFW best, given the reality that limited resources preclude the implementation of a true core curriculum.

At its October 1 meeting, the GES reached consensus on three of the following four issues:

1. General Education should be a subset of the IPFW curriculum selected on the basis of pedagogical and other criteria as may be proposed by the committee. (passed unanimously)
2. The current concept of an area approach to satisfy GenEd II-V requirements should be maintained (passed by a vote of four yes, two no).
3. The GES should (a) clarify and/or revise current area II-V definitions and as a part of these definitions (b) list the appropriate A&S departments and non-A&S departments and disciplines in that area. (passed unanimously)
4. A motion that Area I requirements remain the same as currently defined in the GenEd program did not pass (three yes, three no).

At the October 15 meeting, the GES reached consensus on the following two issues:

5. The Advanced Study requirement will consist of three credit hours outside the major. (passed unanimously)

6. Advanced Study courses meet general-education criteria and require completion of the Area I requirement plus any applicable pre- or co-requisite courses specified by the program offering the course.

Discussion

1. (First recommendation) After much discussion of the respective rationales for the various proposals, the committee focused in on one key difference between the current program and the Haw/Iadicola proposals: The issue of *criteria*. Several committee members argued strongly that a strength of the current program is the criterion that all courses approved for GenEd credit “should help students advance their understanding and mastery of skills in the Linguistic and Numerical Foundations area,” since these skills are needed throughout a student’s college career (and throughout life), and since these skills cannot be mastered by simply completing the nine-credit Area I requirement. The Haw proposal, on the other hand, implies that criteria would be used to determine which courses outside of A&S would count toward GenEd requirements (“Resolved, that the General Education Subcommittee be charged, in consultation with the relevant academic unit, with approving adjustments /senate-dev .@), but no criteria are specified. As the vote on this recommendation shows, the committee members voted unanimously in favor of criteria.
2. (Second recommendation) In discussion, some committee members focused on the long tradition of the A&S disciplines as a basis for General Education and on a preference for providing students with an understanding of a discipline-based approach to knowledge before exposing them to interdisciplinary approaches. Others focused on the fact that the traditional disciplines are no longer (or perhaps never were?) monolithic, and that there is much crossover in terms of theory and methods between the traditional humanistic disciplines and the traditional social/behavioral science disciplines, for example. A further point of discussion was that the Haw proposal opens the door to such “crossovers” (as well as to approval of courses from outside A&S); thus, the line between discipline-based distribution areas versus broadly defined topic areas is not clearly drawn. As the vote on this recommendation shows, a majority of the committee members currently favor the broad topic areas.
3. (Third recommendation) All the committee members feel strongly that the current Area II-V definitions are in need of clarification and revision.
4. (Fourth recommendation) As noted earlier, two proposals (Haw and Iadicola) recommend expanding Area I (Foundation Skills). Committee members who support a computer literacy requirement feel strongly that computers are so ubiquitous that computer literacy is indeed a foundation skill and should be added to the curriculum. However, the committee as a whole does not agree on what a computer literacy requirement should look like nor on whether it should indeed be a foundation skills requirement. Arguments in favor of a non-quantitative reasoning requirement are that forms of reasoning other than quantitative (e.g., scientific reasoning, critical thinking) are equally important (if not more so) and are not necessarily acquired by completing GenEd requirements in Areas II-V. As the split vote shows, the committee is not in agreement as to whether Area I should be expanded and if so, how it should be done, but the committee does agree that if

another requirement is added to this area, there must be ample time to plan for its implementation and to develop the course(s) that would meet the requirement.

5. (Fifth recommendation). The current Advanced Study requirement was seen by some as desirable but unworkable, by others as a challenging (to both students and teachers) requirement that merits further attention, and by others as redundant, since many if not most students complete project-oriented courses as part of their major. Indeed, several programs currently allow their students to meet the six-credit Advanced Study requirement by taking project-oriented courses within the major; however, this practice is contrary to the spirit of a broad-based general education. After much discussion the committee voted in favor of an Advanced Study requirement that is outside the major; however, it was agreed that six credits outside the major is probably too burdensome, and that this requirement should therefore be reduced to three credits.
6. (Sixth recommendation). The committee reached the conclusion that the current prerequisite for Advanced Study courses (completion of Area I requirements and attainment of B3 status) is unnecessarily restrictive; therefore, it is recommended that the B3-status prerequisite be dropped (unless, of course, B3 status is specified by the program offering the course). The committee also believes, however, that students should not enroll in Advanced Study courses before completing the nine-credit Area I requirement, since project-oriented courses assume facility in foundation skills. The criteria for Advanced Study courses will be revised along with the criteria for the other areas.

Other issues

7. **Area V.** The committee has discussed the pros and cons of Area V (Artistic Expression) at length, but has not yet voted on whether to recommend keeping the requirement as is, abolishing it, expanding it (by including art, theatre, and music appreciation here instead of in Area IV, Humanistic Thought), or replacing it by some other requirement.
8. **Assessment.** Finally, the Senate also charged the committee with providing evidence of the current program's effectiveness. We are working with Institutional Research to collect data that should allow us to address this issue; the pilot assessment reports for Areas II and III (conducted during 1997-98) and Areas IV and V (conducted during 1998-99) will also provide material for this discussion. The committee does not yet have the data from Institutional Research.

Tasks remaining to be completed

The GES will propose a revised General Education program to the Senate as soon as possible upon completion of the following, and any other items that may arise:

1. Review course proposals submitted for October 1999 review.
2. Prepare assessment report.
3. Complete discussions of Areas I and V.

4. Review the number of credit hours required in each area.
5. Revise area definitions.
6. Revise selection criteria.
7. Review mechanism for approval of GenEd courses