

Committee on General Studies
Annual Report, Academic year 2017-2018

Membership:

Elizabeth Pollock	Chair
John O'Hara	Vice-chair, GEN Convener, union rep
Christine Ferri	Freshman Seminar Program
Marcy Isabella	GAH Convener
Judy Vogel	GIS Convener
Wondi Geremew	GNM Convener
Manish Madan	GSS Convener
Rain Ross	ARHU
John Pearlstein	BUSN
Shelly Meyers	EDUC
Kerri Sowers	HLTH
David Lechner	Library

Ex Officio Members

Robert Gregg	Dean of General Studies
Lisa Honaker	Dean of ARHU, provost designee

2017-2018 Committee Activities

The General Studies committee met three times during the past academic year. The following items were discussed:

- Even faculty who value the student feedback received through the end of semester IDEA evaluations have been known to forget to fill out the form setting the appropriate objectives. In the past, the system has defaulted to the assumption that the faculty member would have chosen to do the evaluation on-line and would have rated all of the objectives as 'important'. The management system is capable of handling different default choices for different programs and thus a request was made that the committee specify the default for all G-courses. The committee recognizes that the G-curriculum is diverse, both in content and teaching modality, and thus it is unlikely that three objectives would accurately capture what is important for every course but a better default selection, while still imperfect, is to be preferred over a default that makes no distinction between IDEA objectives. The default IDEA objectives, those that best capture the spirit of the G-curriculum, that will be rated as 'important' for faculty who forget to make their own selections are now:
 - Objective 3 – Learning to apply course material
 - Objective 11 – Learning to critically evaluate ideas, arguments and points of view
 - Objective 12 – Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking my own questions and seeking answers
- The procedure for moving an already approved G-course from one category to another was articulated as follows: In most instances the course has already been vetted

effectively enough and doesn't need to go through the full approval process again. Instead, the faculty member should send course materials and a thorough explanation of why the course no longer fits its original category and how it belongs in the new category instead to both the convener responsible for category the course is requested be moved into and the convener responsible for the original category. The two conveners will both review the request and make the decision about the switch together. If the conveners feel the course changes are more substantive than a gradual evolution of a course and really make the course an entirely new entity, they can tell the faculty member that the course cannot be moved between categories but must instead go through the new course proposal process.

- A conversation was had on the expectations for the syllabus and supporting information within a new course proposal. Consensus was that more is better. The point of the process is to make sure that faculty have really thought through what they are teaching and why. Demonstrating this requires more than a vague outline of general topics that are probably going to be covered in the course. We agreed on some general requirements, articulated below. The website explaining how to propose a General Studies course will be updated to reflect these expectations.
 - Tentative syllabi do not necessarily have to have a week-by-week or day-by-day schedule already in place, not all faculty put that level of structure into syllabi for courses they've taught for years and would find it difficult to do so for a course they've never taught, but do need to have a solid demonstration of the semester structure and overall flow of the course with key themes and topics articulated as well as a general sense of how much time might be spent on each of these topics.
 - Probable textbooks and other course materials must be included.
 - The major assignments must be articulated. This includes an explanation of how the assignment helps meet the goals of the course (this is supposed to be done in the course proposal itself. Conveners have little power but if a convener doesn't think the explanation of how the goals, whether they be course content, ELO or G-studies goals, are going to be achieved and assessed they can tell the proposer that the course is not yet ready for presentation).
 - Assessment goals/learning objectives should be included on the syllabus, not just the proposal.
- A conversation was begun on assessment of G-courses for Middle States. The previous G-assessment was limited and worked better in some categories than in others, relying as it did on a written prompt that did not lend itself to courses in which writing was a significant component of the course. Any G-assessment is liable to be imperfect, and the committee expects to spend the next academic year flushing out an assessment strategy, but several possibilities were floated, including:
 - Using relevant questions from NSSE
 - Looking at what General Studies, ELOs, and IDEA objectives are being used for cross-category comparisons
 - Using syllabi and course proposals to assess course design and how it has changed over time