

Ferris State University
General Education and Student Learning Committee
Preliminary Report

Submitted To

Dr. Michael Harris and Dr. Thomas Oldfield

For Deliberations Toward Advancing General Education At Ferris State University

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Committee Charge

The General Education and Student Learning Committee, currently consisting of eight faculty/administrators from across campus, was created to address the following philosophically oriented charge:

Phase I

Review and disseminate information on

- a. the learning paradigm
- b. assessment of student learning outcomes
- c. current Higher Learning Commission accreditations standards

Review and disseminate information on how other institutions assess general education

Phase II

Review and determine the effectiveness of the general education assessment conducted at Ferris

Phase III

Recommend

- d. ways in which Ferris can more closely follow a learning paradigm
- e. ways in which we can improve our general education assessment efforts

Approach

The committee has been exploring and reviewing the current general education program at FSU, current and emergent general education practice literature, and our own varied mental models of general education.

- What is the current state of GE outcomes at FSU?
- What are the possible types of GE paradigms at which we might look?
- What has research discovered about the effectiveness of GE education?

In the course of this review, the committee has concluded that there are recommendations we are able to advance to the office of the VPAA preliminary to the complete report, specific decisions the committee feels able to recommend without further research and discussion.

Recommendations

A. The Mission Statement should address lifelong learning, moral development, and civic engagement in addition to career-oriented, professional and technical education.

In our examination of General Education philosophies (especially Colby et al.'s *Educating Citizens*), and programs at various institutions (especially those presented in "Changing General Education Curriculum" (*New Directions for Higher Education*, Spring, 2004, Number 125), it becomes clear that a key factor in developing good general education programs and assessing the efficacy of these programs is their goodness-of-fit with the institution's mission statement.

The mission statement of Ferris State University is:

Ferris State University will be a national leader in providing opportunities for innovative teaching and learning in career-oriented, technological and professional education.

While this statement identifies Ferris' uniqueness in its focus on "career-oriented, technological and professional education", it limits the purposes of "innovative teaching and learning" to these goals alone.

Some have argued that the term "career-oriented" assumes those facets of a graduate's life beyond the workplace; for example, developing a lifelong learning habit of mind, developing a solid moral framework for making choices, and developing a commitment to civic engagement. However, these facets of a student's educational experience at Ferris ought not to be left to assumption.

This Committee recommends that the Mission Statement be expanded to make a stated commitment to general education that would include (but not be limited to) these three objectives:

- a. lifelong learning (outside of career or profession)
- b. awareness and appreciation of diverse perspectives
- c. critical thinking
- d. civic engagement

Many components of the current General Education program already speak to these objectives, without direct support in the Mission Statement (emphasis added):

1. **The Communication Competence outcome seeks to develop the student's awareness and knowledge of audience, in both written and spoken forms, in order to adapt messages appropriately and effectively in all social situations. Appropriate adaptation demands development of a moral standard for choice-making.**
2. **The Reading outcome seeks to develop reading skills for Ferris graduates "to utilize in their Professional, Civic, and Personal Lives".**
3. **The Reasoning Ability outcome seeks to develop Ferris graduates with "competence in problem-solving, critical thinking and independent decision-making with respect to both personal and professional issues. Graduates should also be able to apply principles of ethical decision-making, valuing and civic responsibility in both their personal and professional lives."**
4. **The Cultural Enrichment outcome seeks to develop graduates who, "through the humanities, arts and literature, ...enrich their own lives, ...increase their understanding of themselves and their culture, and ... expand their understanding of the experience and cultures of others, including the experience and cultures of other nations and cultural traditions."**
5. **The Race/Ethnicity and/or Gender outcome seeks to develop graduates who have examined the importance of issues surrounding race/ethnicity/gender "in a society and work environment where issues of diversity are recognized as important towards social awareness and working conditions."**
6. **The Social Awareness outcome seeks to develop graduates who can "understand and address issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, social tradition and change, cultural diversity, and human development and behavior" in order to build effective "interpersonal relationships, professional competence, and responsible citizenship".**
7. **The Scientific (and Quantitative) outcomes seek to develop graduates who have the "broader base of academic skills, analytic flexibility, and general knowledge required for continued learning, performance and advancement in their personal and professional lives." The Scientific outcome further seeks to advance "an informed citizenry" with the "skills necessary to respond to an ever-changing and unpredictable world."**
8. **The Global Consciousness outcome seeks to develop graduates who can "demonstrate a working knowledge of the world, its diverse cultures, and the geographic, economic, cultural and historical relationships among nations and peoples."**

As demonstrated, the learning outcomes of lifelong learning, moral development and civic engagement are already embedded in the current General Education outcomes.

Furthermore, President Eisler has recently reframed the Ferris' mission in his "Vision for Ferris and Its Future" as an institution that can make a "difference (through) an education based on a strong academic core, with specialized preparation for a career...in helping graduates be prepared for success."

B. Regarding Race, Ethnicity, and/or Gender (REG) and Global Consciousness (G) in General Education at Ferris State University the committee recommends the following:

1. To remain in sync with current general education practice, Race, Ethnicity and/or Gender and Global studies must remain as specific categories in the Ferris State University General Education program.
2. The 75% requirement for REG should not be lowered and the 50% requirement for Global Consciousness should be raised to 75%.
3. The Office of VPAA should initiate a plan ASAP to implement the REG courses from list A and to discontinue counting the courses from list B (as described in the memo to the university community by former VP Chapman).
4. The "moratorium" on general education operations, initiated largely in response to controversy over REG and the A/B list change, should be lifted and general education procedures go back to full operation starting with W05.

Explanation:

The committee reviewed and discussed the *Handbook of Accreditation* from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, recent reading material on general education,¹ information from those committee members reporting from the recent Assessment Conference of the American Association for Higher Education (Denver, June, 2004), the REG documentation on the Ferris State University General Education web site, and the suggestions from the Senate General Education Task Force Committee and noted the following:

- The importance of the study of diversity issues, including race, gender, and global education in general education is not a point of contention in current general education scholarship. Discussion of these issues began in full force in the 1970's and the decisions regarding the importance and implementation of race, gender, and global studies became formalized in education throughout the 1990's. The Criteria for Accreditation by the Higher Learning

¹ Esp. James L. Racliff, et al, *Changing General Education Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) no. 125, Spring 2004 and Coby et al., *Educating Citizens* (), .

Commission of the North Central Association was revised in 2003 to specifically address the importance of diversity study in general education and states the following:

Criterion Statement Four

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

Core Component-4C

The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

Examples:

- ** In keeping with its mission, learning goals and outcomes include skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce.**
- ** Learning outcomes document that graduates have gained the skills and knowledge they need and knowledge they need to function in diverse local, national, and global societies.**
- ** The organization provides curricular and co curricular opportunities that promote social responsibility (3.1-5).²**

- Recent scholarship on race, gender and global education, as evidenced by the most recent assessment conference, already assumes that these issues are important to general education. Rather than arguing for inclusion of them, which has already been done, current scholarship focuses on how to adequately assess these subjects of study.
- According to the study on curricular changes from 1999 to 2000 in "A Decade of Change in General Education,"³ one of the three most frequently reported reasons for changing general education was to "update" the program. "The programs had been revised in many cases," according to the study, "by adding specific courses in diversity and multiculturalism...and understanding the impact of the increasing internationalization of society" (26). Many had added "stated goals" for diversity and global to their general education programs (19).
- Based on their expertise in the areas, members of the Race, Ethnicity, and/or Gender assessment committee determined that a course must include at least 75% of race, ethnicity and/or gender content to meet the REG criteria. More recent REG committees have been asked to review the 75% requirement and have agreed that the 75% is required to assure that the course is focused on

² This is the assessment guidebook from the accrediting body for Ferris State University.

³ pp. 9-28 in *Changing General Education Curriculum*, written by D. Kent Johnson, James L. Ratcliff, and Jerry G. Gaff.

these issues and that the treatment of them is based on current theory and appropriate content.

C. The following corrections/clarification should be made to the existing General Education Outcomes Criteria Language

Upon review of the general education outcomes, the General Education and Student Learning Committee recommend the following: (Proposed revisions are in italics.)

I. Writing

A. Written products.

- and
1. "College graduates should be able to adapt to the workplace

produce a variety of written documents as required;
~~specifically, they should be able to write. Examples of written documents may include:~~
 2. The committee recommends that the documents listed are

not

mandatory but are examples of written documents that may be required for the course.

II. Speech Communication

A. No revisions.

III. Reading

A. No revisions.

IV. Reasoning Ability

A. No revisions.

V. Cultural Enrichment

A. Cultural enrichment course criteria.

1. Eliminate the last portion of the criteria ("One of the pivotal...their overall relationship to the world."). The first sentence is sufficient.

B. "Courses designated as Cultural Enrichment general education courses should:"

1. ~~"Be taught by faculty with the appropriate credentials."~~ "be taught by faculty with qualifications and background (such as graduate training and teaching experience) in the subject matter that meet the standards for university level instruction in that discipline."

VI. Race / Ethnicity and/or Gender

A. The committee members support the following criteria:

1. "No matter how the course is configured, at least 75%, of the course content must be based on issues clearly defined as race/ethnicity and/or gender."

VII. Social Awareness

- A. No revisions.

VIII. Global Consciousness

- A. "The course must meet the following criteria:"

1. ~~At least 50% of the course content must be concerned with one or more of the following areas of a region(s) or country(ies) outside North America: Geography, Economics, Language(s), Culture(s), History.~~ *At least 50% of the course content must address one or more of the following areas of study concerning regions outside the United States and Canada: Culture(s), Economics, Geography, History, Language(s).*
2. ~~The course must focus on understanding such regions or countries. Narrowly specific material that does not develop understanding of the area, in its broadest sense, does not foster "global consciousness". The course must provide the students with an understanding of the contemporary cultural context of the (those) region(s) and area(s) of study.~~
3. ~~Omit the following: The course should introduce, clarify or clearly use methods for understanding other regions and other cultures, including global interrelationships.~~

D. In addition to these recommendations, the committee has concluded that any significant changes be made incrementally so as to fully inform the university community and assure proper and functional transitional of all areas affected by the changes.

This recommendation is in full alignment with the concept of a learning university. In fact, according to Peter Senge "If there is one single thing a learning organization does well, it is helping people embrace change."

Model for Incremental Change to General Education

The following model for incremental change⁴ frames our current thinking with respect to exploring ways to improve General Education at FSU. The model is predicted on several assumptions/conclusions - drawn from our research to date - that frame our approach to finding promising improvement avenues and recommendations. The model is not intended to imply any particular improvement recommendations to GE content or processes - rather to guide our

⁴ Anderson, Dean and Linda-Ackerman Anderson, Change Leaders Roadmap February 2001, Pfeiffer

search for those particulars by framing them in terms of incremental improvement of the current GE program.

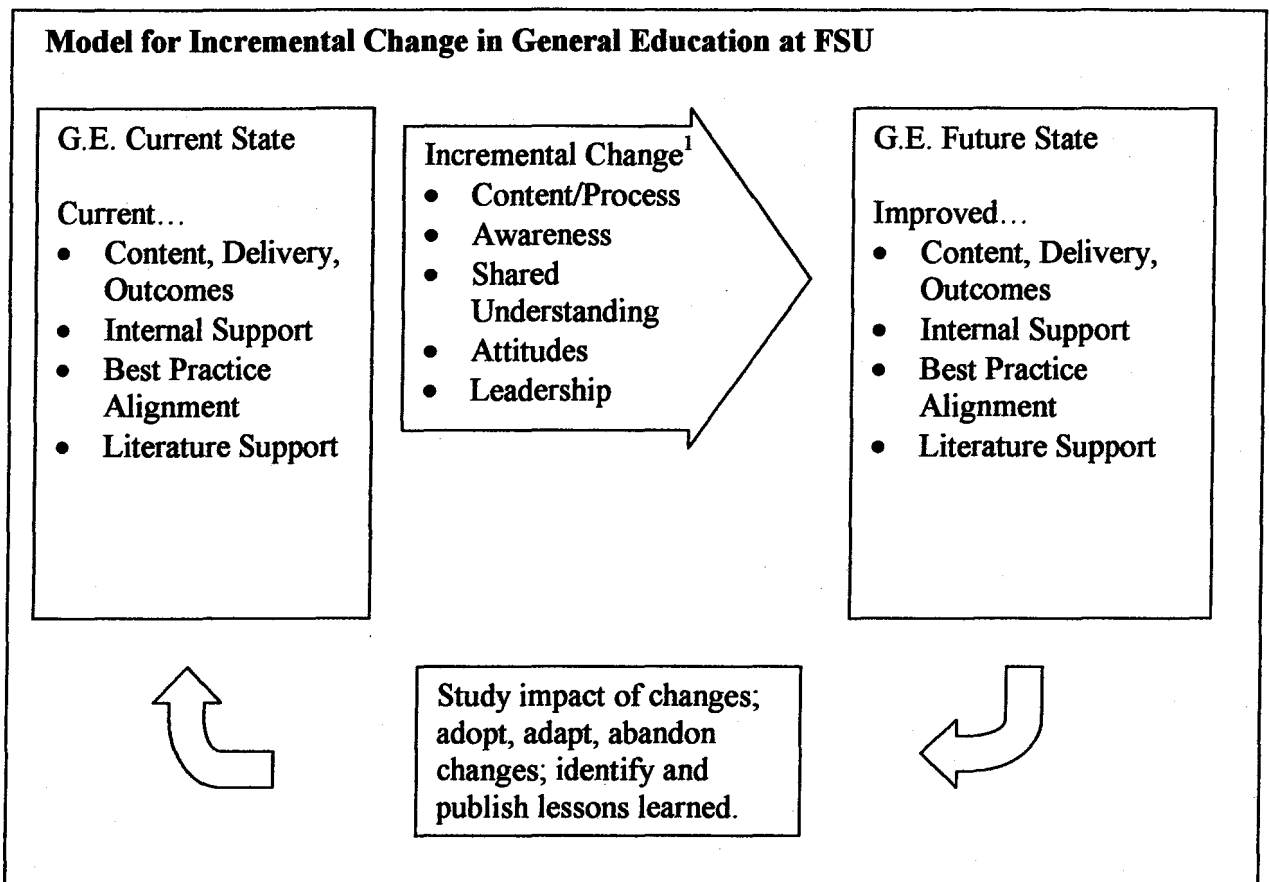
The current GE program at FSU was, when deployed, strongly supported by best practices and thinking at the time. According to our research, which we plan to extend, the current program continues to enjoy substantial alignment with current best practices and thinking. As such, we seek ways to elevate the GE program through cycles of sustainable incremental improvement rather than through more radical change strategies such as re-engineering. This approach dramatically impacts how we proceed to find particular improvement opportunities in terms of incremental to content, classroom delivery, and outcomes - as opposed to innovative or radical improvement change.

The model suggests continued incremental change to promote awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward GE and the assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of GE among FSU stakeholders. In fact, the most readily available improvement in the GE program may well be not a change in the program per se but in the collective awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward GE among FSU stakeholders.

The model also articulates the committee's commitment to an emphasis on change leadership to effect improvement. Adopting strong change leadership⁵ approach to the deployment of whatever incremental changes the committee suggests coupled with a strong recommendation to promote awareness, understanding, and attitudinal changes to GE at FSU might demand an innovative rather than incremental change. In other words, while the committee will likely recommend incremental change to the current GE program, the committee will also recommend more innovative change to the process of change implementation. [narrative explaining role of constituency survey and focus group research as aid to better change leadership]

⁵ Kotter, John P. "Winning at Change" *Leader to Leader*. 10 (Fall 1998): 27-33.

Model for Incremental Change in General Education at FSU



Incremental change grounded in scholarship and data that suggest improvement