

## **Pathway to Success for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Redesigning General Education**

### **Background**

The last redesign of general education at Morehead State University was initiated seventeen years ago (December 1990) by President C. Nelson Grote. By 1992, the faculty had revised the program goals and, by 1994, prepared a framework for courses. The first 29 courses within that framework were offered in the fall of 1997 (Board of Regents Handbook, September 13, 1996).

Since that examination of program goals and instructional models nearly two decades ago, the student population at Morehead State has changed. Increasing numbers of non-traditional students, with diverse expectations, are enrolled. More undergraduate students take coursework at multiple institutions, many through online offerings, making coherence across the curriculum a challenge. Moreover, the original number of 29 courses has grown to 156, yielding unified assessment of the program untenable.

In the spring of 2007, to begin the process of evaluating the general education curriculum, Provost Michael Moore convened a General Education Task Force including Eric Jerde, Jill Ratliff, Geoff Gerner, Debbie Abell, Yvonne Baldwin, Dayna Seelig, Al Baldwin, and Kathryn Mincey.<sup>1</sup> Most of the team attended the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) Institute on General Education in Rhode Island in May 2007 with the mandate to explore a general education re-design process and curriculum to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> Century global competition. In July 2007, the Task Force met with Provost Karla Hughes, who asked these individuals to serve as the General Education Leadership Team to oversee the process of general education redesign at MSU.

### **Premises**

Research and consideration so far have suggested that a general education curriculum should achieve the following goals:

- Clarify program aims
  - to provide an integrated liberal arts foundation
  - to underpin high quality academic programs
  - to meet the demands of a global, 21<sup>st</sup> century environment
  - to satisfy expectations of employers
- Establish measurable learner outcomes
- Facilitate four-year completion for affordability

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<sup>1</sup> Members were nominated from the Faculty Senate, the general education subcommittee of the undergraduate committee, the President's Leadership Academy, and the Chair's Forum. Each submitted three names for consideration for the five slots MSU had reserved for the AAC&U meeting. Individuals were selected to provide balance among disciplines, academic positions and related staff positions, length of service at MSU, and expertise. Some were nominated by two different groups; those received highest consideration. Debbie Abell was added to the AAC&U committee as team leader to serve as a resource for information about our current general education practices and to continue to serve as a liaison to CPE for the transfer process.

### **Premise 1: Clarifying Program Aims**

The AACU Greater Expectations National Panel (GENP), comprised of twenty-five respected educators and leaders charged with formulating a new vision for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, suggested the following general education aims for continuous improvement:

“Students will continue to pursue different specializations in college. But across all fields, the panel calls for higher education to help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives. To thrive in a complex world, these intentional learners should also become:

- **EMPOWERED** through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
- **INFORMED** by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
- **RESPONSIBLE** for their personal actions and for civic values

For more detail, see Appendix A.

In addition to providing an integrated liberal arts foundation, underpinning high quality academic programs, and meeting the demands of a global, 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, a general education program should also prepare students to meet expectations of future employers.

### **Premise 2: Establishing Measurable Outcomes**

According to the 2006 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) report, “Identifying and Exploring Issues of Compliance,” evidence of compliance in demonstrating attainment of general education competencies is third on the list most-cited issues, with 61% of institutions found in non-compliance. The current general education assessment process at Morehead State University does not provide the accurate picture of student proficiency required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). We cannot determine, with our current structure, where value is added to the educational experience and whether our students are prepared to work and live in a global, complex society

Tracking and measuring student progress from the beginning and throughout a program is critical. Another important assessment element is evaluating the connection between the general education curriculum and departmental program student outcomes sequentially. The GENP has established the principle that “reaching ambitious goals for learning requires integrating elements of the curriculum traditionally treated as separate—general education, the major, and electives—into a coherent program.”

### **Premise 3: Facilitating Four-Year Completion and Affordability**

The national and statewide concern with college education affordability is especially important in the region we serve; over 53 per cent of MSU students are Pell-eligible. Internal requirements that extend the financial burden for our students include the number of hours required for degree completion and the loss of scholarship awards due to the number of hours students are advised to carry each semester.

In spite of the fact that SACS requires a minimum of 30 hours of general education and CPE policy requires 33 hours, MSU currently requires 48. In spite of the fact that state guidelines require only 120 hours for a baccalaureate degree, all MSU programs currently require at least 128 hours, asking MSU students to carry at least eight hours more than the minimum requirement. Many carry up to 26 hours more to complete a degree. While 63 of our current degree curriculum maps list 128 hours, 54 have requirements beyond 128 hours, ranging from

129 to 154 hours. Moreover, although 21 programs carry no specific general education course requirements, 36 programs require 1-3 specified courses; 31 programs require 4-6 specified courses; 27 programs require 7-10 specified courses; and 3 require 11- 14 specified general education courses, leaving students in those programs with little choice.

A review of MSU departmental curriculum maps reveals that students are advised to take a range of 31 to 36 hours during their freshman year. The *Kentucky High School Feedback Report* for regional systems, from which we recruit the largest portion of our student body, indicates that even students without developmental needs have difficulty earning 30 hours during the first year of college. Most students from regional schools average between 25 and 28 hours during their first year of college. More than 90 per cent of non-developmental students from those same school systems have less than a 3.0 GPA at the end of their freshman year. A GPA below 3.0 greatly affects a student's ability to retain scholarship awards. Therefore, a majority of students, by the end of their freshman year, will have difficulty following the prescribed curriculum map to stay on track for graduation.

Both the perception of falling behind relative to an academic plan and losing scholarship awards affect retention of students. According to the same report, retention rates for students without developmental needs are high from fall to spring term. However, rates drop considerably from freshman spring term to the beginning of the second year. The statistics are much worse for students needing even one developmental course. Clearly, four-year completion and greater affordability can more likely be achieved with a slightly leaner general education program and slightly lower total number of hours for degree completion.

### **External Considerations for Redesigning General Education**

**SACS Principles** - Compliance with the following SACS Principles should guide the process of General Education Reform:

- General education will be at least 30 credit hours for a baccalaureate and 15 hours for an associate degree program, will be a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, will ensure breadth of knowledge, and will be based on a coherent rationale. Credit hours will include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural science/mathematics. The courses will not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. (2.7.3);
- Both faculty and administration will approve all educational programs for which academic credit is awarded (3.4.1);
- Primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum rests with the faculty (3.4.10);
- The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies (3.5.1);
- The institution defines and publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs (3.5.3);
- Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs (4.4).

**Seamlessness and Transferability** – Building on the efforts of the Statewide P-16 initiative, in spring 2004, the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) established the Seamlessness Policy Group to develop recommendations that would facilitate the successful

transition of students from high school to college by breaking down the barriers involved in transferring from one institution to another. Later that year, the Council of Chief Academic Officers (CCAO) provided to the CPE the following policy recommendations related to the transfer of general education credits. These recommended changes were submitted in an effort to improve statewide transfer among institutions and to provide a mechanism to reduce costs for students who transferred within our state system (CPE, 2004). The policy is based on the following principles:

- transfer is predicated on the acquisition of competencies in broad academic areas, rather than a direct comparison of individual courses taken at one institution or another;
- each institution recognizes the professional integrity of all other public institutions in acceptance of their general education program;
- AA/AS degree graduates will be admitted to junior-level standing with the acceptance of corresponding general education credits as meeting institution-wide lower-division general education requirements;
- specific general education competencies for particular majors will not be set aside by the policy.<sup>2</sup>

This policy became effective spring term 2005. General education certification is based on a 33-hour general education core which consists of the following core categories: 1) Communications – 9 hours; 2) Humanities – 6 hours; 3) Mathematics – 3 hours; 4) Natural Sciences – 6 hours; and 5) Behavioral and Social Sciences – 9 hours. There are also three certification levels: 1) category-certification, for which students complete at least one but not all of the categories listed above; 2) block-certification for which students complete all categories listed above; and, 3) full general education certification for which students complete all of the categories listed above plus any additional general education requirements of the sending institution (CPE Web site, [www.cpe.ky.gov](http://www.cpe.ky.gov)).

### **Internal Considerations and Recommendations**

**Concurrent Curriculum Audit** - Academic Affairs will conduct a curriculum audit of all academic programs during the 2007-08 academic year. The concurrent process will include an evaluation of current general education courses that also fulfill departmental degree program requirements. Academic departments will have an opportunity to revise these courses to more appropriately address their program objectives.

Additionally, the curriculum audit process is intended to help academic units define knowledge, skills, competencies, and dispositions to which students need to be introduced as they migrate into the academic degree programs. Presumably, students will continue to develop the defined knowledge, skills, competencies, and dispositions in their majors or areas of concentration.

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<sup>2</sup> With any revision of general education at MSU, transfer students will be able to use the CPE block transfer process to be general-education-block certified from another Kentucky university and will only be required to take the capstone course to finish MSU general education requirements. Transfer students who have not completed the entire block of general education at another Kentucky university will have courses evaluated on a course-by-course basis for transfer into MSU's general education program. Completion of MSU general education courses by transfer students will follow the required sequence and timeline for core courses and will be outlined on the curriculum map when the transfer student is initially advised.

Concurrent progress on both the redesign of general education and the curriculum audit process provides the opportunity to address academic quality and student success, a concern of constituents who would consider MSU as their university of choice, according to the recent Stamats marketing study.

**General Education Design Recommendations** - To maintain the integrity of general education redesign and to fully integrate the foundation of core competencies into the total curriculum, students will be required to take the 15-hour core of general education within the first three semesters of enrollment at MSU or during the time that a student is classified as a freshman/sophomore. The capstone course must be taken during the senior year, i.e. within two semesters of graduation. The remaining general education courses, yet to be determined, must be completed prior to the semester in which the student enrolls in the capstone course.

Learning outcomes will be evaluated at multiple levels with documentation contributing to the continuous improvement process for the general education curriculum. A designated committee is currently reviewing and evaluating assessment strategies, to be designed after outcome measures are identified, in order to accomplish the multifaceted review of student learning outcomes. Students will participate in a formative assessment after the completion of the 15-hour core and a summative assessment within the capstone course.

The University Studies degree will be revised to a framework of integrated and focused clusters of learning supported by general education choices. Academic Affairs must address and critically review the issue of student transfer from specific programs of study to the University Studies degree late in a student's degree program to minimize the tendency for students to circumvent the capstone course for the major.

**Organization, Process, and Faculty Participation** – In order to develop and facilitate integrated, multidisciplinary studies and to conduct consistent assessment of continuous improvement throughout the program, administration of general education courses may likely be accomplished by a single unit rather than scattered across academic colleges and departments. Such a structure would offer many opportunities to faculty, departments, and academic programs.

A faculty committee will recommend the approval process by which courses in the redesigned general education program are developed and implemented. Faculty may also develop Honors sections of general education courses and seminar blocks that meet the learning outcomes for inclusion in the general education course bank for Honors Program students.

Faculty currently assigned within departments may teach at least part, or perhaps all, of their load in general education, based on interest and preparation, leading to flexibility in teaching assignments and eventual migration toward differentiated workloads. For instance, because integration and multidisciplinary approaches to general education will be recognized as part of the faculty load, faculty will have an opportunity to direct their careers toward their strengths and interests. Academic Affairs will provide focused professional development to provide additional support as needed.

### **Recommended Process and Timeline**

The general education reform process will proceed along a defined timeline towards full implementation in fall 2010. The process will be transparent and inclusive and will afford all interested individuals in the MSU community the opportunity for participation, input, feedback, and approval throughout the 36-month timeline. See Appendix B for timeline details.

## **Summary**

In order to meet the aims of general education established above, the program should:

- Prepare students for a future that is rapidly changing by asking and answering such questions as “What knowledge, skills and dispositions will be important for a 21<sup>st</sup> century graduate living and working in a global, complex world?”
- Develop a system of assessing and reflecting on student outcomes across a sequential curriculum to determine if general education goals are met.
- Reduce the number of required program hours from 128 hours to the statewide mandate of 120 hours in the interest of affordability and enhancing graduation rates within a 6-year cohort.
- Reduce the general education core from 48 hours to 36 hours (33 hours plus the capstone course) by ensuring that general education outcomes are woven throughout a student’s total program.
- Place an emphasis on integrated learning experiences with newly developed courses.
- Determine how to measure the success of our graduates who may bring a majority of their general education course work from other institutions.

## **Afterword by Dr. Karla Hughes, Provost**

Morehead State University has been diligently setting the stage to become the best regional public university in the South. In order to move in this direction, we will encounter many challenges and opportunities. One such opportunity is in the redesign of the general education curriculum. This process has the potential for those of us in Academic Affairs to create a general education curriculum that enhances academic excellence and student success. Building on the foundation of the core, we have the knowledge base and creativity to develop curriculum that will change the course of our student’s future, preparing them to be responsible citizens and life-long learners. With this general education framework, the future is ours to build.

## Appendix A

### The AACU Greater Expectations National Panel's General Education Aims for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**“The empowered learner.** The intellectual and practical skills that students need are extensive, sophisticated, and expanding with the explosion of new technologies. As they progress through grades K-12 and the undergraduate years, and at successively more challenging levels, students should learn to:

- effectively communicate orally, visually, in writing, and in a second language
- understand and employ quantitative and qualitative analysis to solve problems
- interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources
- understand and work within complex systems and with diverse groups
- demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change
- transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action.

**The informed learner.** While intellectual and practical skills are essential, so is a deeper understanding of the world students inherit as human beings and as contributing citizens. This knowledge extends beyond core concepts to include ways of investigating human society and the natural world. Both in school and college, students should have sustained opportunities to learn about:

- the human imagination, expression, and the products of many cultures
- the interrelations within and among global and cross-cultural communities
- means of modeling the natural, social, and technical worlds
- the values and histories underlying U.S. democracy.

**The responsible learner.** The integrity of a democratic society depends on citizens' sense of social responsibility and ethical judgment. To develop these qualities, education should foster:

- intellectual honesty
- responsibility for society's moral health and for social justice
- active participation as a citizen of a diverse democracy
- discernment of the ethical consequences of decisions and actions
- deep understanding of one's self and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories, and their cultures.

Taken together, these outcomes form the core of a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal education—liberal not in any political sense, but in terms of liberating and opening the mind, and of preparing students for responsible action. The panel calls for a new national commitment to provide an excellent liberal education to all students, not just those attending elite institutions and not just those studying traditional arts and sciences disciplines. Professional studies—such as business, education, health sciences, technologies—should also be approached as liberal education.”

## Appendix B

<b>Redesigning General Education Timeline</b>		
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Targeted Completion</b>
Formation of MSU Team to participate in AAC&U General Education Conference	February, 2007	
AAC&U Conference, Rhode Island	May, 2007	
AAC&U Conference report and General Education discussion with Provost Hughes. MSU Team becomes General Education Task Force	July, 2007	
President Andrews comments on the upcoming Re-design of General Education during Fall Convocation	August, 2007	
General Education Task Force writes and distributes "Pathway to Success for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: Redesigning General Education", including presentation to Faculty Senate	October, 2007	
General Education Reform website launched, including the Developing Learner Outcomes Survey	October, 2007	
Faculty Senate directs the formation of a Faculty General Education Council		31 October 2007
Campus Conversation on General Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group (students, faculty, staff, alumni, employers, etc.) discussions of Learner Outcome survey results and other Gen Ed issues.</li> <li>• Review of Best Practices in General Education and Assessment</li> </ul>		Fall 2007
Data analysis and development of General Education Goals. General Education Program development.		Spring 2008
Faculty vote to approve new General Education Program		1 May 2008
Develop Guidelines for the Certification of new General Education Courses		Summer 2008
Development, Submission and Certification of new General Education courses.		Fall 2008 – Spring 2010
Implementation of General Education Core		Fall 2009
Full Implementation of re-designed General Education		Fall 2010

## REFERENCES

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