

FINAL REPORT

REVIEW OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Submitted December 6, 1996 by;

The Colleges of the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee

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REVIEW OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM 1995-1996

Executive Summary:

In 1995-1996 the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee (ASCC) undertook a general review of the GEC. The curriculum had been in place for five years, the North Central accreditation process was urging the University to assess its basic undergraduate curriculum, and the Committee on the Undergraduate Experience (CUE) had in May of 1995 recommended an examination of the core curriculum, toward its simplification and possible reduction. ASSC members (assisted by several additional representatives from other units across the University) first examined the details of the existing curriculum, and then considered possible modifications and enhancements. Hopes for improvement lay in three areas: first, some parts of the GEC (in description and in application) seemed extremely **complicated**—greater simplicity would be desirable. Second, perhaps the GEC was **too extensive**, especially in the context of major programs (largely in the sciences and the technical professional fields), which were themselves extensive and prescriptive. And finally, the incomplete implementation of some parts of the GEC left students and advisors somewhat uncertain as to the importance of some requirements.

Hoping to address the issues, the Committee made a number of recommendations for modifications of the GEC as currently applied:

1. Writing and Related Skills—the third writing requirement should be implemented in all departments where it does not currently exist, contingent upon sufficient funding from the Office of Academic Affairs; this will reduce an element of “uncertainty” about the curriculum. (This change should not add hours to any degrees, since Third Writing courses almost always are created in the context of existing major curricula.) For B.S. students the Second Writing course should be allowed to count as fulfilling another category of the GEC or in the student’s major or minor program (possibly saving 5 hours.)
2. Quantitative and Logical Skills—for B.S. students, the separate Data Analysis requirement should be eliminated (saving 5 hours in a few majors.)
3. Foreign Language—for students in Arts and Sciences, proficiency through the 104 level should continue to be required. (No change.)
4. Natural Science—for B.A. students, this category should be made more flexible by requiring only one sequence. Students would still take four courses, at least one in the biological and one in the physical sciences, and at least one laboratory-based. (Simplification, no reduction.)

5. Social Science—we should continue to require three courses, but the student would no longer need to select one course from each of the three sub-categories, thus allowing more focus in an area of interest. The “international” requirement would be handled separately, eliminating the complicated superscripts—see below. (Simplification, no reduction.)

6. Arts and Humanities—the historical survey would remain unchanged. The three-course Arts and Humanities requirement would remain, and students would still need to take at least one literature course and one fine or performing arts course; but the “non-western” requirement would be handled separately, eliminating the matrix-like super-scripts of this category—see below. The title “Other Humanities” should be changed to “Cultures and Ideas.” (Simplification, no reduction.)

7. Social and Cultural Diversity—Social Diversity would henceforth have three aspects, described simply and at one location on the curriculum sheet: students would take one course on social diversity in the United States and two courses on non-American cultures, at least one of which would be non-western or global. All of these courses would “double-count” (as they do now) and they would be distributed throughout several categories of the curriculum. (Define simplification.)

8. Capstone Experience—for B.A. students, the “advanced study” requirement should be eliminated (this has not been in place for B.S. students.) For B.S. students, the “contemporary world” requirement should be removed. (Five hour reduction for both sets of students.)

9. Drop-a-course Option for B.S. students—some B.S. students (in specifically identified, highly structured curricula) should be allowed to drop one additional five-credit-hour course from their requirement list. (Five hour reduction.)

Overall, the Committee believes that the changes recommended will be beneficial to our students. B.S. students will find their general curriculum reduced by as much as twenty hours; B.A. students will have their GEC shortened by five hours. Probably more important than reductions in the GEC, however, are the simplifications which should make the program both easier to understand and more flexible in its application, giving students a greater sense of personal choice as they construct their curricula.

During Autumn Quarter the Arts and Science Faculty Senate will vote on these recommendations. If approved, they will be submitted to the Council on Academic Affairs and, if approved there, become the new ASC curriculum. Throughout the process of review, the ASC Curriculum committee was assisted by representatives from the professional colleges, the health sciences colleges, and the regional campuses. This participation was designed to provide information flow both to and from the non-ASC colleges, so that proposed revisions were consistently discussed in terms of their possible implications out beyond Arts and Sciences. With this prior consultation, it should be possible for the non-ASC colleges to arrive at their own revisions relatively quickly; it is assumed that the other colleges will submit their own recommended modifications,

probably more or less in the spirit of the changes adopted for B.S. students in ASC. (For external membership of the Committee, see list on the cover sheet of this report.)

In the process of the review, the Committee examined very extensive sets of data about the GEC and its application. A chronological list and a complete set of these materials are available for faculty examination in the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Office (Room 141 Denney Hall); the eight numbered “appendices” referred to in this document and a historical review of the Committee’s work are included here.

Context of the Review

The review of the GEC was undertaken in the context of a larger, ongoing project at Ohio State to improve recruitment of and enhance service to its undergraduates. At the center of any such effort must lie a well-organized, well-explained, and well-delivered curriculum. Students must be able to enroll in their GEC courses and complete their requirements in a timely way; effective academic advising must support students in their curricular selection process; and bureaucratic obstacles to academic success must be minimized. A number of recent institutional initiatives have addressed different aspects of this overall goal.

1. By supplying additional funding for oversubscribed courses and through the electronic wait-list program implemented by the University Registrar, the Office of Academic Affairs has greatly reduced the problem of students’ being unable to enroll in required courses.
2. Following recommendations from CUE, academic advising is being reorganized and enhanced. The number of professional advisors has been increased, and they are working with faculty members to provide students with improved and better integrated guidance about their academic and career options. More attractive, “user-friendly” documents to support the advising and scheduling process are being developed. Grids displaying the applicability of each individual GEC course to the different versions of the curriculum across the campus will be helpful in advising students who transfer from one program to another within the University. [See Appendix 1, “GEC Course List.”] And curricular information in attractive, easily understood, and readily up-datable formats is being put up on the World Wide Web for easy student access.
3. To work effectively, any curriculum must be applied to students with some flexibility and regard for individual needs. It has always been the custom of the University to respond to particular cases, most typically through the curricular petition process. An improved advising system will allow us to respond more personally and quickly to specific cases, especially when students seek to strengthen their programs. Specifically, the process of awarding transfer credit will be reorganized so that new transfer students can know at or very shortly after their admission how the credit from their earlier institution will count in their Ohio State curricula. College offices will base

decisions on the spirit of our curricula when applying transfer credit to our requirements. [See Appendix 2, section of “Transition-In Task Force Report.”]

4. It seems likely that Ohio State will liberalize our policy toward capable students who, although they show academic promise, had failed to complete the prescribed set of college-preparatory courses and thus have been admitted to the University “conditionally.” This is an issue separate from that of “remediation;” the problem is that many students, especially from small-town or rural high schools, have been unable to take courses for credit in all of the fields required for unconditional admission (by far the most common deficiency is in the arts, where students may well have been active in music or drama without having been able to take a credit course.) In the context of an increasingly selective admissions process we can take account of high school preparation as one aspect of a student’s qualifications. The Council on Enrollment and Student Progress and the Faculty Committee on Admissions are suggesting that under-prepared students should be required to make up their deficiencies within their elective hours at the University, but not be forced to add hours to their graduation total. Such a policy modification which would bring us in line with peer institutions in the state while presenting a more welcoming face to our new students.

5. The recruiting information we distribute to prospective and entering non-transfer students also sometimes presents our curricula in ways that could be more welcoming. For example, students who undertake and do well in three or four years of high school foreign language study can earn five or more hours of EM credit through our placement tests; and some newly admitted mathematics students similarly earn credit toward graduation. We should emphasize more vigorously the advantage that this kind of good high school preparation can bring to the student. Furthermore, across campus there has been considerable discussion about the usefulness of Ohio State’s developing “Four Year Graduation Plans” similar to those used at several other Big Ten institutions to make clear what is needed for timely graduation and to help a student plan an academic course with some confidence. [See Appendix 3, “The University of Iowa Four-Year Graduation Plan.”]

Philosophy of the General Education Curriculum:

By long-standing practice—and probably in recognition of our tradition as a broadly accessible, land-grant institution—the general education curriculum at Ohio State has been relatively extensive and somewhat prescriptive; and as the Curriculum Committee undertook its most recent review, a quick consensus emerged in favor of continuing to observe this basic approach. Faculty members and students alike believe that Ohio State University should continue to require its students to be exposed to a solid set of foundations, or basic skills and experiences, as well as to a distribution of learning experiences in the sciences, the arts and humanities, and the social and behavioral sciences (traditional aspects of a liberal education.) Thus, the philosophy of the 1988 Model Curriculum of the GEC was reaffirmed.

At the same time, the Committee recognized that there were good reasons to try both to simplify and somewhat to shorten the GEC. The complexity of the curriculum makes it hard for students to understand and often creates difficulties of scheduling; and for transfer students the program's inflexibility makes it especially inhospitable. It was concluded that the curriculum was unduly complex and could be simplified to some extent without doing any significant harm to the original intent of the GEC. In particular, the "subsumed" requirements, in which superscripts are embedded within categories of requirements, in turn located within another tier of requirements, should be eliminated.

With regard to the size of the curriculum, our analysis made it clear that the large size of the GEC can be an issue for students in science-based and technically-based curricula, but not so much for those in the typical liberal arts-based programs in the social sciences or the humanities. Consequently, in the interests of generating more choice and elective credit opportunities, one modest change in the size of the B.A. curriculum is recommended; by contrast, a more substantial reduction in the GEC credit hours required is recommended for students pursuing degrees in the scientific and technical fields (B.S., tagged degrees in the arts.) These accommodations are intended to make it easier for students pursuing science-based programs to complete their course work, including some elective credit and experimentation, in a timely way.

Summary of the Information Gathered:

1. In comparison to the earlier LAR/BER curriculum, the GEC implemented in 1990 does not—for most OSU colleges—represent much of an expansion in size. Careful consideration of actual changes in students' curricula before and after the GEC was instituted revealed that the additions were more modest than generally perceived. Of 39 degree programs, only four increased required total credit hours, while 17 programs lowered the total credit hours and 18 programs left the total credit hours unchanged. Such increases as did occur usually were put in place at the cost of a reduction in elective hours, and even those increases were modest. In sum, the GEC did not contribute significantly to the overall credit hours required by degree programs for graduation. (We hasten to note, however, that these statements depend on the fact that three sectors of the approved GEC—foreign language, third writing, and capstone—were never implemented campus-wide; full implementation might well have led to considerable and widespread discontent with the size of the curriculum.) [See Appendix 4, "A Comparison of the 1995 and the Pre-Autumn Quarter 1990 Curricula."]

2. At this point the University is in general delivering the curriculum adequately—that is, relatively few students are unable to enroll in the courses they need. In recent quarters, access to course has improved considerably both because of the Office Academic Affairs' systems of funding "closed courses" and because of the Registrar's development of the wait-list mechanism. The Committee examined detailed data on the availability of courses, noting that close-outs were most prominent in classes requiring small section size (e.g. second writing and foreign language.) [See Appendix 5, "Observations from Summary Data, Academic Years 1990-1995."]

3. The courses offered in the GEC are in general still meeting the goal espoused in the Model Curriculum of 1988. Panels of the Committee examined statistical data and recent syllabi of all the GEC offerings on a course-by-course basis. Some recommendations for improvements were made by the panels, and a few instructors or departments responsible for particular courses were contacted for additional information. Some follow-up work concerning specific courses remains to be completed in 1996-97. [Appendix 6, "GEC Panel Reports."]

4. Students and faculty by and large continue to be satisfied with the general outlines of the GEC and believe that it is appropriate for the University to continue to require a broad liberal education of its students. Faculty and academic counseling staff from the five colleges of Arts and Sciences were surveyed as to their opinions of the curriculum, and several focus groups of students were held to assess student opinion. Although individual concerns about specific aspects of the curriculum emerged from both groups, overall it is fair to say that the Arts and Sciences community expressed strong support for the principle of a general education and framework in the Ohio State curriculum. [Appendix 7, "Student Sentiment Concerning the General Education Curriculum;" Appendix 8, "College Poll Summary."]

Category-by-Category Recommendations:

Writing and Related Skills

- Implement the Third Writing requirement—Rationale: Writing requirements were highly regarded by all constituencies. The Third Writing requirement, in which students learn expression in writing in the context of their major programs, was viewed as an essential part of the GEC and an important foundation for student success after graduation. The failure to implement this component up to this time has been fiscal only, and the Committee saw the modest expenditure of funds necessary for implementation as a good investment.
- For Bachelor of Science students, permit the Second Writing course to count as fulfilling another category of the GEC (where the course has been reviewed and approved) or on the student's major or minor program—Rationale: This double counting, without harm to the original intent of the GEC, would save students in science-or technology-based curricula five hours, which could be spent elsewhere (e.g., the major program or elective credit.)

Quantitative and Logical Skills: Data Analysis

- For Bachelor of Science students, eliminate the Data Analysis requirement—Rationale: the original GEC anticipated that the Data Analysis requirement would be completed by science-oriented students within the context of their major program, and for the most part this expectation has been fulfilled. A few programs have continued to require a separate course from their students; with the modification recommended here, it is expected that such programs will need to

make certain that their students confront these essential skills within the context of the major, almost certainly through material integrated into existing courses.

Natural Science

- For Bachelor of Arts students, require only one sequence in the Natural Sciences (i.e., eliminate the requirement of a second sequence)—Rationale: This change would provide flexibility for students. For those students not pursuing science-based curricula, one sequence would meet the spirit of a rigorous exposure to science.
- Distribution of courses for B.A. students: at least one course (of the required four) must be from the biological sciences, and at least one from the physical sciences. One course must be laboratory-based—Rationale: It has always been the case that B.A. students are expected to be exposed to both the physical and the biological sciences, and this aspect of the curricular requirements would not change.
- Eliminate Option 2 for B.A. students. This option (five courses, but with only one sequence) is rarely used; this change will have almost no effect on student schedules.

Social Science

- Reorganize the International Focus requirement as a separate category—Rationale: To reduce complexity in the curriculum, this requirement is folded into another, new category; see below.
- Require three courses, with at least one course in two of the three sections of the category—Rationale: There was little support for eliminating the three-category division of the social and behavioral sciences, merging these into one larger category. At the same time, students, faculty, and academic counseling staff called for more flexibility in the curriculum, wherever possible, and course work in two of these three categories seemed to meet the spirit of the idea that course work in the social sciences should be distributed.

Arts and Humanities

- Eliminate the regional focus requirement within this category, dealing with this concept instead under the rubric of Diversity Experiences (see below)—Rationale: The single most ringing criticism of the GEC concerned the almost Byzantine complexity introduced by placing the regional focus requirements within the three sectors of the Arts and Humanities part of the GEC.
- Change the name of the third section of the Arts and Humanities from “Other Arts and Humanities” to “Cultures and ideas”—Rationale: the old name led students to view this section of the curriculum as undefined and extraneous. Courses in the category do fit together with conceptual integrity, and their content would be effectively described by the new title.

Capstone Experiences

- For Bachelor of Arts students, eliminate Section A, Advanced Study—Rationale: The advanced study requirements existed in curricula (but not for B.S. students)

- even before the GEC. It was intended to ensure that students achieved some depth in the liberal arts portion of their curriculum, but the Committee noted that B.A. students automatically achieve depth in liberal arts fields through their major programs. Elimination of this requirement would provide the B.A. student with more flexibility.
- For Bachelor of Science students, eliminate the Issues in Contemporary World portion of the Capstone category (the advanced study requirement had never applied to B.S. students)—Rationale: To accommodate successful completion of a degree (including the major, the GEC, and some elective credit), it was felt necessary to pare the curriculum for the student pursuing a science-based degree. Student testimony (anecdotally and at the focus groups) indicated that this course—especially coming as it does in the senior year—has been frequently problematic, and faculty in the sciences agreed that this requirement was expendable for their students. Since this category was one that had never been fully implemented, its elimination for B.S. students should both reduce course crowding and help clarify the curriculum.

Diversity Experiences

- Reorganize the “Diversity Experiences” category so that it is comprised of two parts. “Social Diversity in the United States” (one course) and “International issues” (two courses, at least one of which must be non-western or global.) Courses in all three areas will be found throughout the curriculum and will be allowed to overlap with another GEC category or with the major—Rationale: The Committee found that the Social Diversity requirement worked well, with adequate availability and without causing students difficulty in scheduling. However, the “international focus” requirement was subsumed within the Social Science category and the Arts and Humanities category contained a “western/non-western” subsumed requirement, both of which were very hard to understand and extremely difficult to schedule. Adopting the pattern recommended here would give students many more options and flexibility without doing harm to the original intent of the GEC. As before, these requirements would add no credit hours to a student’s curriculum, as these courses will continue to “double count.” The list of “International Issues” would be drawn from the Social Science category: International Focus; the Arts and Humanities category (courses currently listed as having a regional focus); and certain “historical survey” courses (when they have been approved for this category). There should be little difficulty rearranging courses and offerings to accommodate this change.

Drop-a-course Option for Bachelor of Science Students

- Students pursuing a B.S. degree in certain identified academic areas may elect to drop one course from the GEC requirements in order to accommodate the substantial size of the major programs in these science-based curricula. In selecting eligible programs, the Committee will consider the number of hours now required for the major and the continuing tendency (resulting from graduate school admissions requirements or pressures from external agencies) to expand the size of the major even further. Decisions about the applicable fields will be

made by the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee, on a rolling basis as requests are presented. The Drop-a-course Option may be used only as follows: 1) in the Natural Sciences category, if the student has completed one sequence and has met the distribution and the laboratory experiences requirements; 2) in the Social Sciences category, if the student has one course from each of two of the sections; 3) in the Historical Survey requirement, if the student has completed the first course in the sequence; 4) in the Arts and Humanities category, if the student has taken one literature course and one visual/performing arts course; or 5) in the Foreign Language category, if the student has proficiency through 103.

Rationale: Students majoring in the fields listed above have curricula in the major program so substantial that it is difficult, in a timely way, to achieve their degree and prepare for graduate study or employment. The option described here lightens these curricula by five hours, while ensuring that the general spirit of the GEC requirements still be met by these students.

Summary of Credit-hour Savings

For the Bachelor of Arts student:

- Advanced Study 5 credit hours

For the Bachelor of Science student:

- Double counting of 367 5 credit hours
- Data analysis 5 credit hours (very few students affected)
- Capstone 5 credit hours
- Drop-a-course Option 5 credit hours

For many B.S. students, the total savings will be 10 credit hours. For those in selected majors (astronomy, biochemistry, computer and information science, geological sciences, microbiology, and physics), the savings is likely to be 15 hours. Only a few B.S. students will realize a 20 credit-hour reduction in their GEC course work.

Overall, the Curriculum Committee of Arts and Sciences believes that the considerably simplified and somewhat contracted General Education Curriculum which we here recommend, when communicated effectively and applied with consideration for the needs of the individual student, will represent a real improvement in the educational program of our University.

MOTION CONSIDERED BY THE ASC SENATE:

The Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee recommends the revisions of the General Education Curriculum explicated above.

Approved by ASC Faculty Senate—December 3, 1996.

Approved by the Council on Academic Affairs—March 5, 1997.