

**A Report of the
General Education Review Subcommittee of the
University Academic Affairs Committee**

**Submitted to the University Provost and to the
University Academic Affairs Committee on September 14, 2012**

Recommendations

The General Education Review Subcommittee has completed the review of the general education program and makes the following recommendations concerning the general education program at Lewis University.

1. Based on the Summer Task Force study, information gathered by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and best practices identified at general education conferences, the subcommittee recommends the creation of a permanent general education committee. This committee will administer the general education program. This committee will also work with departments and university committees in assessing the general education curriculum. In terms of governance, this committee will report to UAAC. Recommendations approved by UAAC will then go to the individual colleges for final approval. Members will be appointed to the committee.

2. Based on the Summer Task Force study, information gathered by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the Lewis University Strategic Plan 2017 and best practices identified at general education conferences, the subcommittee recommends that the general education program be integrated into the Lewis University assessment process.

3. Based on the faculty survey, the student focus groups, the employer data, the Lewis University 2017 Strategic Plan, AAC&U data and best practices at general education conferences, the subcommittee recommends that the general education program be revised. The results of the faculty survey indicated that 95.2% of the faculty believed the general education curriculum needed to be revised in order to meet the educational needs of students. Of the faculty, 65.7% believes the general education needs minor revisions to meet the needs of students. Of the faculty, 29.5% believes the general education curriculum needs major revision to meet the needs of students.

As part of that revision, the subcommittee also recommends that the following issues be considered:

- a. Consider how to incorporate a general education vision and student learning outcomes into the program. Our research indicated that virtually all general education programs begin with a vision and student learning outcomes. A curriculum is then created to achieve those outcomes and then those outcomes are assessed to determine the success of the general education curriculum.
- b. Consider how to incorporate civic engagement into the general education program. The biggest gap the subcommittee found when reviewing the general education curriculum at Lewis was the lack of civic knowledge and engagement for our students. Lewis is not alone in this area. The lack of civic knowledge and engagement among college students has been identified as a national crisis.
- c. Consider how to vary the difficulty of the general education courses. The information presented at general education conferences and employer reports recommends that general education curriculum should not be an introduction to all disciplines. Some of the coursework should be at the junior/senior level and others at the freshman/sophomore level.

- d. Consider the pedagogy of general education courses. The students' main concerns were the lack of engagement and relevance in the courses. The students indicated they wanted more discussion and activities and less lecture and PowerPoint. The best practices identified by AAC&U and the general education conferences also indicated greater learning and satisfaction through high impact practices. Students and employers also wanted more relevance in the curriculum and more application of skills and knowledge to the complex world students' face today.
- e. Consider how to strengthen writing in the general education curriculum. Students, faculty, and employers all identified stronger writing skills as essential for students in the general program.
- f. Consider how to develop the students' technological literacy. Students, faculty and employers want students to be able to use technology in the acquisition, processing and dissemination of information. Stakeholders want students who can create content, read content and make decisions with technology. In addition, stakeholders want students who can effectively use technology as part of a liberal education to more completely appreciate their culture and world.
- g. Consider how to incorporate foreign languages into the general education curriculum. The Lewis University Strategic Plan and employers highlight understanding globalization as a key learning outcome. The faculty and students have also indicated a desire for foreign language opportunities in the general education curriculum.
- h. Consider the creation of a capstone course. Capstone courses provide interdisciplinary curriculum possibilities. The capstone also provides high-level demonstration of student learning outcomes. Faculty has indicated a desire for team teaching and interdisciplinary coursework. Students want more engagement in their classes. National organizations and accreditation agencies want best practices and the demonstration of higher-level student learning outcomes.

Therefore, the General Education Review Subcommittee recommends that the faculty vote on the following motion:

A permanent general education committee of the University Academic Affairs Committee be created to revise and administer the general education program at Lewis University.

Background Information

The General Education Review Subcommittee began with the following members Dr. David Anderson (chair), Dr. Dominic Colonna, Dr. William Marker, Dr. Laurette Liesen, Dr. Pam Jesse, Dr. Michelle Young and Professor Rita Amerio. In examining whether the Lewis University general education program continued to meet the need of students, we examined our historical mission, conducted focus groups of students, examined the current Baccalaureate Characteristics, examined what employers wanted, examined peer and aspirant institutions, conducted a faculty survey, examined civic engagement and the Lewis University 2012-2017 strategic plan.

History and Mission: The subcommittee examined the role of a liberal arts education in the 21st century. Lewis University and the Christian Brothers have a long history of providing a liberal education to students. The question for the subcommittee is whether the current general education program still meets the learning outcomes we have for our students in the 21st century. To examine where we have come from see, “The Mission of Lewis University, the Liberal Arts, and the General Education Curriculum Report of the General Education Task Force Summer 2012” in the General Education Blackboard Shell. In addition, the Association American Colleges and Universities makes both a civics and economic case for a liberal arts education. See

http://www.aacu.org/leap/What_is_liberal_education.cfm

In addition, the Lewis University Fall 2011 convocation speaker, Dr. Tia McNair, reinforced the following AAC&U statement of liberal learning (www.aacu.org/About/statements/liberal_learning.cfm):

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

We experience the benefits of liberal learning by pursuing intellectual work that is honest, challenging, and significant, and by preparing ourselves to use knowledge and power in responsible ways. Liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study. What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.

Because liberal learning aims to free us from the constraints of ignorance, sectarianism, and myopia, it prizes curiosity and seeks to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. By its nature, therefore, liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.

The ability to think, to learn, and to express oneself both rigorously and creatively, the capacity to understand ideas and issues in context, the commitment to live in society, and the yearning for truth are fundamental features of our humanity. In centering education upon these qualities, liberal learning is society's best investment in our shared future.

Focus Groups: In April 2010, four focus groups were conducted to obtain an initial idea of how satisfied Lewis University students were with the general education program. All senior students were invited by email to participate in the focus groups. In addition, department chairs were asked to encourage their graduating seniors to participate in the focus groups. Sixteen students participated in the four focus groups. A summary of the recurring responses for each question is located in the Backboard shell. In reviewing the results of the student focus groups, we reached the following conclusions:

1. Overall, students are generally satisfied with the breadth of the general education curriculum.
2. Students are satisfied with the quality of faculty in the general education program.
3. Students want more engaging and interactive classes. They are tired of the lecture-test format. In their words, they consider lecture-test courses “high school courses” and more engaging and interactive courses “real college courses.”

4. They want more relevance in their classes. They want to see how the course affects their lives or is relevant to understanding their culture and world today. They also expect the instructor to make the connection and to explain, model, or identify how the class is relevant today.
5. A sub-group of the students finds the courses not challenging and rather slowed paced.
6. The students see the need for the general education courses but are ambivalent about taking the courses.

The focus group data was consistent with other information the subcommittee examined. At the national conferences, speakers indicated the need for more engagement, high impact practices and relevance in general education programs for today's students. Employers also stressed the need for more relevance and application of curriculum for students. The subcommittee recommends that a revised general education program needs to examine pedagogies that enhance engagement and the application of concepts and principles to the student's culture and world.

Baccalaureate Characteristic Subgroups: During 2010-2011 academic year 7 sub-groups were formed to examine each of the Baccalaureate Characteristics. This approach came out of faculty participation in the 2009 AAC&U General Education and Assessment Conference. The approach stems from the work of Catherine Wehlburg and is described in "Using a Faculty Created Transformational Assessment Paradigm for General Education: Faculty Learning Communities" from the REAP International Conference on Assessment Design for Learner Responsibility, 29th-31st May 2007.

During the 2010-2011 academic year, the sub-groups focused on 3 main tasks. First, the bullet points in the Baccalaureate Characteristics were examined to determine if they accurately captured the essential learning outcomes the faculty were trying to attain. In addition, the faculty was reviewing the bullet points to determine if there were any gaps or missing information that the bullet points do not address but the faculty consider to be an essential student learning outcome. Second, the groups were asked to restate the general bullet points as more specific measurable learning outcomes. Third, the groups were asked to then assess the extent to which these learning outcomes were being achieved by the current general education curriculum.

Following is the status of the subcommittee's work on the 3 items. First, with regard to evaluating the BC bullet point outcomes, most of the changes have been a rephrasing of the wording. Second, with regard to rewording the bullet points there were some problems in writing learning outcomes. There appeared to be some good discussion about what skills and knowledge the faculty wanted students to attain, however the statements are still quite broad and not measurable. The third area concerned assessing how we are doing. This part of the process led to a lot of frustration on the part of the sub-groups. After 30 years of the curriculum of the 80's very little data existed to determine how we are doing. During this part of the process, it also became very apparent to the subcommittee that a new organizational structure was needed at Lewis University to oversee and administer general education. Questions concerning who is responsible for collecting data, what type of data should be collected, what type of data already exists and who coordinates all of this information needs to be addressed.

Based on the sub-group findings the subcommittee recommended that a new structure for general education administration be created at Lewis University and that a faculty survey of the Lewis University general education program be conducted.

Summer 2011 Task force on General Education Structure: One of the conclusions drawn from the work of the sub-groups during 2010-2011 was that Lewis University needed a different organizational structure to manage and assess the general education curriculum. Given the tremendous growth of Lewis University since the last general education review in 1979, the subcommittee believed that a revised general education organizational structure was needed. The subcommittee established a task force to examine the general education structure of our local competitors, our aspirant institutions and the best practices of Midwest and Catholic market leaders. The group consisted of Dr. William Marker, Dr Rita Amerio and Dr. David Anderson. The subcommittee contacted the institutions to find out how their general education program was administered for both curricular matters and assessment. A summary of the results can be found on the BlackBoard site.

In reviewing the data from the various institutions, the subcommittee found that institutions have adopted a student learning outcomes model for their general education programs. Most institutions had a

small set of required courses and a menu of courses for students to fulfill their general education requirements. The courses listed were approved by a general education committee as long as they fulfilled the student learning outcomes for that category.

In addition, all institutions have a general education committee that examines curriculum and works with assessment data. These committees tend to have a diverse membership and report to a faculty academic committee or faculty senate. The committees are also in charge of assessing the general education curriculum or work with an assessment committee to assess the general education curriculum. In both cases, the results of the assessment are reported to a faculty academic group or faculty senate. One of the major goals of these committee is the creation of student learning outcomes for the general education curriculum. The committees then use these student learning outcomes to evaluate courses for inclusion into the general education curriculum. Subsequent assessment data determines if these student-learning outcomes are being met.

Based on these findings the subcommittee recommends the creation of a permanent general education committee, which will report to UAAC or a future faculty governance body. The subcommittee also recommends that this general education committee work with individual departments and the Assessment Office to create and implement an assessment plan for the general education curriculum.

Faculty Survey: A faculty survey was conducted in Spring 2012 to determine faculty satisfaction with the current general education curriculum. Surveys were made available online to all full-time voting faculty at Lewis University. One hundred and two surveys were completed for a response rate of 48.6%. For a detailed summary of the survey results see the Faculty Survey Results on the BlackBoard site.

Overall, 95.2% of the faculty believes the general education curriculum needs to be revised to meet the educational needs of our students. Of this 95.2%, 65.7% of the faculty believes the general education program needs minor revision and 29.5% believe the general education program needs major revision to meet the needs of our students.

Faculty was also asked whether the current general education curriculum program provides students with the opportunities and curriculum to achieve the various Baccalaureate Characteristics.

Overall, the faculty did not believe that the current general education program was successful in helping student achieve the Baccalaureate outcomes:

- 56.7% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 1: Essential Skills
- 61.8% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 2: Major Approaches to Knowledge
- 75.5% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 3: Faith, Religion and Spirituality
- 71.8% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 4: Moral and Ethical Decision Making
- 59.% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 5 : Responsible Citizenship
- 51.8% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 6: Critical Thinking
- 67.3% of the faculty were satisfied with Baccalaureate Characteristic 7: Lifelong learning

Only 47.9% of the faculty considered themselves very well informed about the general education program. Sixt- nine point four percent of the faculty wanted to provide more course options for students in the general education curriculum. Seventy-eight percent of the faculty believed that general education courses should have varying degrees of difficulty from the freshman to senior year. Sixty-seven point six percent of the faculty said a revised general education curriculum should have the same number of required hours for students. In addition, 71% of the faculty said the general education program should receive slightly or significantly more resources.

Based on the results of the faculty survey we believe there is an overwhelming consensus that the current general education program needs to be revised. In addition, faculty expressed concern that the current general education program was not achieving the student learning outcomes expressed in the Baccalaureate Characteristics. We also recommend that general education issues be discussed more on campus. A new general education committee could be more active in informing faculty of general

education trends and issues. In addition, a new general education committee could work with existing faculty groups to provide more workshops and presentations on campus concerning general education issues.

Civic Engagement: Throughout the review of general education, civic knowledge and engagement kept appearing as a gap in our curriculum and a nationwide crisis. To get more information on this issue, Dr. Tennille Allen and Dr. Laurette Liesen attended an AAC&U workshop and a series of related panels from January 25 – 28, 2012 in Washington, DC. The workshop and panels brought attention to the crisis in civic literacy and engagement in the United States and what higher education can do to address this problem and threat to our democracy. Dr. Tennille Allen and Dr. Laurette Liesen were given a report issued by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, which was funded by the Department of Education, entitled “A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future” that explained the current state of civic learning and engagement and what universities can do to address this situation. *A Crucible Moment* suggests that contemporary students are best served by an education that includes:

- Knowledge of U.S. history, political structures, and core democratic principles and founding documents; and debates—US and global—about their meaning and application;
- Knowledge of the political systems that frame constitutional democracies and of political levers for affecting change;
- Knowledge of diverse cultures and religions in the US and around the world;
- Critical inquiry and reasoning capacities;
- Deliberation and bridge-building across differences;
- Collaborative decision-making skills;
- Open-mindedness and capacity to engage different points of view and cultures;
- Civic problem-solving skills and experience
- Civility, ethical integrity, and mutual respect.

A renewed emphasis on civic knowledge has also been identified in the Lewis University Strategic plan for 2012-2017. The subcommittee believes any review of the general education curriculum needs to consider how to incorporate more civic learning and engagement opportunities for students.

Employers The subcommittee also examined employer data. Two of the employer reports are in the Blackboard shell. One is an AAC&U sponsored project titled, “Are They Really Ready to Work? Employer Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants into the 21st Century Workforce.” A second report is titled, “Raising the Bar: Employers Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn”

The Association of American Colleges and University employer survey concluded that

- Bachelor’s degrees are becoming increasingly important for employment
- Employers expectations of employees are increasing
- Students need to be prepared for a global economy
- College graduates need both a broad set of skills and knowledge and in-depth skills and knowledge in a focused area
- Employers value educational innovations that foster active learning and research skills
- There should be more emphasis on communication skills, critical thinking, and complex problem solving, ethical decision-making and real world applications of knowledge and skills.

In reviewing the employer data the subcommittee believes that communication skills needs to be reviewed to determine if our students have the skills to meet the changing and increasingly complex demands of the workplace. In addition, employers expressed a need for more depth in general education curricula, that the coursework should not be all introductory. The employers wanted more engagement and application of critical thinking and problem solving to “real world” issues. The employers also expressed the need for students to be prepared to work and live in a global society.

Strategic Plan 2012-2017: The subcommittee also examined the new Lewis University Strategic Plan for implications concerning general education. We concluded that the strategic plan continues to

strongly endorse a liberal arts education for students and recommends a curriculum and pedagogy consistent with what this subcommittee has found over the last two years.

The Lewis Mission statement reiterates the goal to provide a liberal and professional education for students grounded in the interaction of knowledge and fidelity in the search for truth. The University has revised the vision statement to strengthen and highlight a Lewis University liberal education by stating that Lewis prepares students who are intellectually engaged, ethically grounded, socially responsible and globally connected and ready to make a unique contribution to their communities, the region and the world. The subcommittee believes this vision reinforces the idea to examine pedagogies that engage students. The subcommittee also believes this reinforces the idea of a relevant education that the students can apply to their community, region and world.

The strategic plan also identifies many distinctive learning experiences that are consistent with the data collected in the review of the general education program. The strategic plan identifies capstone courses, strengthening writing, increasing experiential learning, stressing ethics, promoting civic knowledge and engagement and global awareness among others. These are all consistent with the data we have collected.

In addition, the strategic plan recommends examining existing structures at Lewis and proposing organizational restructuring to build the foundation for Lewis to become an outstanding, innovative, mid-sized Catholic university. The strategic plan also advocates the acceleration of assessment processes to strengthen teaching and learning. Toward those ends, the committee recommends the creation of a permanent general education committee to revise and administer the general education program at Lewis University.

One final comment: Dr. William Marker passed away during the course of this review. Dr. Marker was committed to the mission of Lewis University of providing a liberal and professional education. We want to remember and thank Dr. William Marker for all of his service to Lewis University and his students.