

I. CONTRIBUTING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Kathy Martensen, *ex-officio*

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2016-2017 General Education Board (GEB) charge letter is included as Appendix A. We believe that we completed all of the charges as indicated, including authoring review criteria for the new U.S. minority Cultural Studies criteria, updating the language in EP.89.09 and GB.91.02, approving 26 of 32 new courses for general education certification in a timely manner, and recertifying 46 of 54 existing courses on their 10-year cycle.

The GEB continues to observe how the university's fiscal situation places pressure on Gen Ed as a potential revenue source for departments in our IU-based funding model. The GEB remains integral to maintaining the integrity of Gen Ed on campus, in light of temptations to increase enrollments of existing and offer new Gen Ed courses without sufficient staffing to meet Gen Ed requirements. While some Gen Ed courses as taught may fall short of the Gen Ed requirements, the GEB certification process makes such courses the exception rather than the rule.

III. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND PROCESS

The General Education Board (GEB) was active and productive during the 2015-2016 academic year. We met eight times and focused our activities on four major activities: (1) review of proposals for new Gen Ed courses, (2) review of re-certification requests for existing Gen Ed courses, (3) updating the language for the review criteria for the Cultural Studies requirements in light of EP.16.80, and (4) updating and amending the language in EP.89.09 and GB.91.02 to be consistent with each other and with current GEB practice.

The GEB reviewed a total of 32 courses for general education certification this past academic year, 26 of which ended up being approved and six were denied. A total of 54 courses were reviewed for recertification of which 46 were recertified and eight were denied. In a number of these cases, the material provided by the departments failed to provide all of the information that the GEB required to make a decision; in these cases, departments were required to submit additional information before decisions were finalized. Of the approved courses, two were not certified for Quantitative Reasoning II, even though they were approved for another category.

The GEB process for certification and re-certification is similar. A three-member subcommittee of the GEB is assigned to perform a detailed review of the submitted materials and complete a discussion over email. Frequently, a unanimous decision is achieved over email, in which case it is only briefly discussed at the next GEB meeting. In cases where there is no subcommittee consensus or where the subcommittee has any questions about the proposed course, a more detailed discussion is undertaken at the next GEB meeting. As (at least a third) of the GEB rotates every year, these discussions are an important opportunity for passing on the institutional knowledge of how to interpret the GEB requirements.

While it is a frequent occurrence that GEB members will remark about how they wish they had the opportunity to take one of the courses that we review, there are a few recurring issues that are the reason for the bulk of the rejections and negative feedback from the GEB. They are:

1. **Weak development of communication skills:** Courses whose assessment is entirely through multiple-choice exams and less than one page of short answer questions are not suitable for Gen Ed certification. Communication-skills based activities should represent a significant portion of the assigned grades and staffing levels should be such to provide detailed feedback on their work. Notably, the GEB has approved courses whose primary communication skills development and assessment is in the form of multimedia (e.g., video production, development of virtual worlds) provided that the instructor is knowledgeable of best practices in the media and provides instruction in its use.
2. **Courses not intended for general education.** We reviewed courses that were restricted to majors or behind a long chain of pre-requisites. We concluded that these courses were seeking Gen Ed certification solely to help students of a given major meet Gen Ed requirements, which we deemed as in conflict with the spirit (and rules) of Gen Ed.
3. **Lacking discussion of women/gender and racial issues.** While this was never the sole reason that a course wasn't approved for Gen Ed, it was frequently among the feedback provided to proposers. That said, the GEB recognizes that there are courses (e.g., Electricity and Magnetism) where such discussion may not fit.
4. **Staffing ratio.** With the current budget situation, departments are under pressure to increase course enrollments without commensurate allocation of staff.

This is particularly a concern for Gen Ed courses where evaluating and providing feedback for written work and/or other communication activities requires significant staff time.

5. **Lacking introductory disciplinary thinking, methods, and theoretical underpinnings.** Gen Ed courses should expose students to new ways of thinking; courses that focus on collections of facts and rote methods fail to meet this expectation.
6. **QR II courses that use math without reasoning.** Rote use of mathematical formula is not sufficient to meet the QR II requirements.

Furthermore, there are a few issues that we discussed and concluded to be not a concern. We'll document them here for the benefit of future GEBs.

1. **Structured special topics courses:** GB.91.02 specifically precludes courses with variable content, because of the difficulty of certifying courses whose content changes. This year, however, we were asked to review HIST 101: "History Now!", which uses a current newsworthy topic as the seed for a deep dive into the historical events that led to the current day situation and struck the GEB as exactly the kind of inspiring kind of course the GEB should certify. As such, we agreed that if the course structure (e.g., amount of writing, the grading rubric) could be preserved across all of the offerings, then the course could be certified.
2. **Language requirements don't preclude a course from being a Gen Ed:** Generally, Gen Ed courses should have minimal pre-requisites so as to be accessible to freshmen as an introduction to a discipline. Courses requiring a language other than English (e.g., GER 331: Intro to German Literature) present an interesting twist on this requirement. As listed, GER 331 requires "two years of college German or equivalent", which makes the course inaccessible to some college freshmen. Nevertheless, we know that many incoming freshmen have completed their language requirements in high school, so the course is accessible to those students. Given that the course otherwise met expectations for a literature Gen Ed, we felt that such courses could be taken in the spirit of Gen Ed and, thus, should be certified as such.
3. **Advanced Composition courses need not be generally accessible:** Advanced composition classes are frequently taught in the context of advanced disciplinary subjects so as to teach disciplinary styles of writing. These courses may naturally have long prerequisite chains and may be restricted to majors. This is deemed as valuable exception to the rules that otherwise require Gen Ed courses to be accessible to those outside the discipline.

Revising the guidelines for Cultural Studies in light of EP.16.80 was discussed over several meetings. We discussed both the spirit of EP.16.80 as well as the specific wording for the revised guidelines. A draft was discussed with both Vice Provost Tucker and the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) and a further revised draft was submitted to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy and was approved at their February 27th meeting.

While courses like AFRO 101: “Black America, 1619-Present” are clearly suitable for the new U.S. minority certification, in developing the revised guidelines, the GEB found it useful to consider *straw man* course titles at the boundary of what should be certifiable under EP.16.80. Three examples of courses that we deemed that could be certifiable are “The American Muslim”, “The Gay/Lesbian Experience in the U.S.”, and “An Introduction to Intersectionality”. All of these courses fit under vs. EP.16.80’s language stating: *“courses focusing on other socially significant identities (for example, sexuality, gender, religion, and disability) or broadly on diversity are appropriate for this requirement as long as the experiences of U.S. racial minorities are significant to these courses.”* Specifically, we interpreted this wording to indicate that courses focused on “The American Muslim” need not be focused on “The African-American Muslim”, provided it significantly covered the experiences of (for example) African-American Muslims and their role in the historical establishment or modern influence in the American Muslim experience. Similarly, courses focused on LGBTQ and Intersectionality theory could also be certified for U.S. minorities provided that they significantly covered the experiences of one or more U.S. minorities. Furthermore, our criteria specifically require such discussions of U.S. minorities within the course to be integrated appropriately in an attempt to avoid tokenism.

While the GEB is applying these new guidelines to new courses seeking certification for the U.S. minorities culture requirement, communications with members from CORE indicated that they had performed a cursory review of existing U.S. minority cultures courses and found that the overwhelming majority likely met the new guidelines as well. As such, the GEB has not made a re-certification of all of these courses a priority and will re-certify them under the existing 10-year review cycle.

Our fourth and final major activity was to update and amend the language in EP.89.09 and GB.91.02. Most of these changes were straightforward, but we proposed language revisions that recognize that specialized faculty are often involved in the teaching of Gen Ed courses and to specifically task departments with staffing their Gen Ed courses to meet expectations for providing students feedback on their communication skills.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of activities are recommended for future GEBs to consider so as to strengthen the integrity of Gen Ed. First, the GEB is concerned about the existing study abroad approval process that permits a student’s home department to approve courses for Gen Ed from other departments. Specifically, we expect that faculty/advisors not familiar with Gen Ed might approve courses that don’t meet (for example) Gen Ed’s communication criteria. Kathy Martensen will connect with Meredith Blumthal and Umberto Ravaioli, who are co-chairing a campus group working on study abroad policy.

Second, it is recommended that the largest Gen Ed classes be re-reviewed on a shorter cycle than 10 years. The current fiscal situation puts Gen Ed under pressure, and

although online courses are ripe for potential abuse, GEB study and discussion suggests that whether a course is online or not is not an effective predictor of whether it is likely to miss Gen Ed expectations. Larger classes, however, simultaneously are both more prone to inappropriate staff-to-student ratios and, when taught poorly, present larger impact to the integrity of Gen Ed. It is likely that the largest 10% of Gen Ed courses represent close to 50% of the Gen Ed credits earned and, hence, should be reviewed every 3-5 years. Because these are only 10% of the courses, increasing their review rate should have little impact on the workload of the GEB.

In addition, a few recommendations for future GEB chairs are as follows:

1. Break the 10-year re-certifications into 2 or 3 batches, where the reviews for each batch are due 1-week before the next GEB meeting. This distributes the work better through the year and ensures the staff can integrate the sub-group's feedback in time for an efficient meeting.
2. Minimize discussion on courses whose sub-committee votes unanimously for or against certification.
3. Consider having a training meeting for new GEB members before the first official meeting. GEB review involves a lot of institutional knowledge, and doing a "mock review" of a previous course proposal could be a way to efficiently get new GEB board members exposure to the scope of the concerns for GEB review. We weren't able to do this for the academic year 2016-17 because the GEB wasn't formed in time.

Finally, none of our student members regularly attended GEB meetings. In fact, I'm not positive if any of our student members ever attended any of our meetings. This is an obvious lost opportunity.