Office of the Provost
And Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

General Education Board

Annual Report
2017-2018

Illinois
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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General Education Board

I. COMMITTEE CHARGE

In May 1989, the Urbana Senate established the General Education Board to “ensure, as much as possible, that general education courses will be valuable intellectual experiences.” Since then, the Board has been responsible for defining the categories of general education requirements for the campus, as well as the criteria for approval of courses within these categories. The Board also reviews individual course proposals, and on a staggered schedule, reviews and recertifies all courses approved for general education credit.

The Board will continue to review proposals for courses new to General Education. In the interest of efficiency, I ask the Board to continue to take action on these requests in the course of the monthly meetings. Materials received in our office will be made available prior to meetings to allow for informed discussion.

Over the last few years the Board demonstrated its support for innovation by allowing for provisional certification of experimental courses, including pilot courses for the Grand Challenge Learning (GCL) initiative. I thank you for your willingness to help GCL and other experiments move forward in a timely manner, and I hope you will continue to be encouraging as the campus explores new approaches to General Education courses.

I anticipate a significant amount of the Board’s work this year will revolve around the new Cultural Studies requirement that affects students starting in Fall, 2018. Action by the Senate in May, 2016 amended EP.89.09 to require three Cultural Studies courses, one concentrating on Western culture, one on non-Western culture, and one on U.S. minority culture. The Senate also specifically charged the GEB to propose changes to the criteria for approval of all Cultural Studies courses and to reconcile disparities between EP.89.09 as amended in EP.16.80 and GB.91.02 with campus implementation of General Education as amended in EP.16.80. The 2016-2017 Board successfully developed the Cultural Studies criteria, which have been applied to review of courses applying for general education certification in these categories effective starting in March, 2017. A proposal to reconcile EP.89.09 as amended in EP.16.80 and GB.91.02 with campus practice was submitted to the Senate Educational Policy Committee in late February, 2017. This year’s Board will need to ensure that EPC completes its review of this proposal and puts it before the Senate. The Board will also be responsible for review of U.S. Minority Cultures course applications, both that are submitted anew and those that are submitted using the survey sent by the Office of the Provost on behalf of the implementation committee this past summer. You should expect higher-than-normal activity in course reviews for the U.S. Minority Cultures category this year and next year.

For your information, two implementation task groups continue to meet to guide administrative preparation for the new Cultural Studies requirement. Those groups will project seats needed, work with colleges and departments to ensure that adequate seats are available, consider TA and instructor training programs, work with degree audit systems, and ensure that academic advisors are equipped to help students with the new requirements. A third group is preparing a plan to assess the impact of the new requirement on student learning and campus climate. The GEB retains its responsibility and sole authority to certify courses for general education requirements, including courses in the U.S. minority cultures category.
II. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Chair*, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Kate Clancy, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Spring)
Susan Curtis, College of Business
Lee DeVille, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Matthew Gilbert, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Spring)
George Gollin, College of Engineering
David Hays, College of Fine and Applied Arts
Chris Higgins, College of Education
Harrison Kim, College of Engineering
Brenda Lindsey, School of Social Work
Stephen Peters, College of Business
Kelly Ritter, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Linda Robbennolt, College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rebecca Sandefur, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Sela Sar, College of Media
John Senseney, College of Fine and Applied Arts
Dan Shike, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
James Swigart, graduate student
Casey Walker, undergraduate student
Jon Welty-Peachey, College of Applied Health Sciences
Ryan Yapp, undergraduate student
Kathy Martensen, Provost’s Office Staff, *ex-officio*

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017-2018 General Education Board (GEB) charge is included as section I. We believe that we completed all of the charges as indicated, with a particular focus on reviewing courses for the activation of the new U.S. Minority Cultural Studies requirement in fall 2018. To that end, we recertified 40 of 46 U.S. Minority Culture (USMC) courses. Additionally, we approved of 29 of 33 new courses for general education certification in a timely manner. We also re-reviewed general education certification courses carried over from the previous year, approving 2 of 3 courses.

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. Our focus this past year on USMC has been driven by our commitment to affirm the integrity of the new requirement while working with academic units to ensure the courses meet the new standard. While some courses as taught may fall short of the Gen Ed requirements, the GEB certification process makes such courses the exception rather than the rule.

1At the request of the department and college, after submission of materials, one course was moved from the USMC category to Non-Western Cultures. While it technically was “denied” as a USMC, it was moved to a different Cultural Studies category that was determined to be more appropriate by the department, college, and the Board.
IV. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND PROCESS

The General Education Board (GEB) was active and productive during the 2017-2018 academic year. We met nine times and focused our activities on three major activities: (1) review of recertification requests for existing U. S. Minority Culture courses, (2) review of proposals for new Gen Ed courses, (3) working with the university Academic Senate for final approval of the updated and amended language in EP.17.74 and GB.91.02 to be consistent with each other and with current GEB practice.

The GEB reviewed a total of 31 courses for general education certification during this past academic year, 27 of which were approved and 4 were denied. We also re-reviewed general education certification courses carried over from the previous year, approving 2 of 3 courses. A total of 46 U.S. Minority Culture (USMC) courses were reviewed for recertification, 40 were approved and 6 denied.1

This year GEB had a discussion about our approach for the review of courses wherein based upon the guidance from the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, review of USMC courses was prioritized. In consultation with the Chancellor’s Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) and USMC Implementation Task Force, an important consideration in GEB approach this past year was developing a clearer understanding of campus preparation for the implementation of the new USMC requirement that goes live in the Fall 2018 semester. Review of USMC courses and providing feedback to colleges and academic units throughout the 2017-18 became the highest priority throughout the past year for GEB.

In a number of 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.

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 it undertaken at the next GEB meeting. As (at least a third) of the GEB rotates every year, these discussions are important opportunity for passing on the institutional knowledge of how to interpret the GEB requirements.

Throughout the academic year, the GEB was in communication with colleges and academic unit leadership about our review process and expectations. The USMC Implementation Task Force conducted a survey of courses units that had USMC general education certification under the previous standard. The Implementation Task Force shared this information with the GEB which we then used to undertake a fast-track review whether such courses qualified under the revised USMC requirement. Our aim was not to replace the recertification process, but rather for the

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GEB to identify US Minority Cultures courses were deemed already worthy of continued certification. The courses given a positive review then remained certified, while units were given feedback as to how their other courses could meet the new USMC. Importantly, courses were not decertified as a result of the GEB’s initial review, but were identified as needing to go through the usual recertification process, which will be a priority for us in the upcoming academic year.

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. **Clearer Communication of U.S. Minority Cultures:** The revision of the U.S. Minority Culture emphasizes that courses certified for USMC general education position undergraduates to develop an understanding of the life and culture of U.S. racial minority populations in order to better prepare them for our increasingly multicultural, multiracial democracy. In consultation with CORE and Implementation Task Force, the GEB sought to reiterate to academic units that USMC courses should:

   - provide deep knowledge of a U.S. racial minority group or
   - provide a comparative analysis across racial groups of their shared experience. In this case, a course could be driven through an organizing theme or concept (e.g., citizenship) to analyze the different racial groups covered in a manner that would educate undergraduates about the racial dimensions of that experience. Such courses aren’t expected to have a lengthy focus on one specific group; rather, the content and delivery should be such that it equips students to be able to think critically across various groups.

   It was noted that USMCs were not supposed to be designed around a tight or narrow definition of culture; rather, the focus around “culture” is a product of the broader Gen Ed Cultural Studies guidelines themselves rather than the USMC guideline. In other words, our guide for USMC should have us read the submitted proposals and syllabus for how they deal with U.S. racial minorities as groups versus through the lens of their treatment of culture.

2. **Courses not intended for general education.** We reviewed courses that were restricted to majors or behind a set of pre-requisites. The Board’s collective belief is that courses seeking Gen Ed certification solely to help students of a given major meet Gen Ed requirements was in conflict with the spirit (and rules) of Gen Ed. This feedback was shared with units as appropriate.

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, we recognize that there are some courses where coverage of these issues may not fit but actively encouraged instructors and especially new course proposals consider these issues more closely.

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.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of activities are recommended for future GEBs to consider so as to strengthen the integrity of Gen Ed. First, we recommend that we break the 10-year re-certifications into multiple 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. Among these courses up for re-certification, it is recommended that re-review of the largest enrollment Gen Ed classes be prioritized. Additionally, large online and hybrid online/face-to-face courses merit earlier review for both assurances about compliance with Gen Ed expectations and also gathering best practices to share with other units. Larger enrollment classes simultaneously are more prone to inappropriate staff-to-student ratios and, when taught poorly, present larger impact to the integrity of Gen Ed.

Second, the GEB should collaborate with colleges on organizing workshops for developing new course proposals for Gen Ed certification as well as how to meet the revised USMC requirement. This will provide the opportunity for the GEB to more clearly communicate expectations based on our reviews the previous cycle(s) to those at the college and academic unit levels that will be submitting proposals. Additionally, it is our expectation that this will also expedite the approval process once new courses are proposed and standing courses are submitted for recertification.

Finally, our student members rarely attended GEB meetings. To encourage participation of all members, we scheduled our meetings at different times throughout our regular Wednesday meeting date to increase participation of all members.