

General Education Committee

Report to Academic Senate – May, 2016

Committee

Committee members (below) met most weeks of AY 2015-16 for at least 1 hour, and reviewed all courses and immersions presented to the Committee. Actions taken by the Committee were communicated to the Office of the Registrar, and the GEC spreadsheet was updated regularly.

Membership:

Carl Lutzer (COS, chair)
Robert Barbato (COB, spring semester)
Charlie Border (GCCIS)
Babak Elahi (Deans' Representative)
Elizabeth Hane (Provost's Representative)
Dawn Hollenbeck (ex-officio, ICC chair)
William Johnson (CAST)
Michael Laver (COLA, fall semester)
Matt Marshall (KGC OE)
William Middleton (COLA, spring semester)
Heidi Nickisher (CIAS)
Sharron Webster (NTID)
Anne Wahl (ex-officio, SLOA)
Kristen Waterstram-Rich (CHST)
Hao Zhang (COB, fall semester)

Charges to the General Education Committee

The following charges to the General Education Committee were received from Academic Senate on 4 September, 2015:

1. Redesign the General Education portion of the RIT Course Outline form to reflect recent changes in the definition of General Education.
2. Design a protocol for approving Special Topics and/or Independent Study courses as General Education.
3. Update the GEC web site to reflect recent changes, and to clarify protocols.
4. Consider new and revised courses that are put forth for designation as General Education.
5. Consider new and revised immersions that are put forth for designation as General Education.

Redesign of the General Education portion of the RIT Course Outline Form

In the fall semester, the Committee designed a preliminary version of the General Education appendix that served as a Cover Page for all courses that came to the Committee for review. This Cover Page was designed to highlight the general education facets of proposed courses, and to provide course authors an opportunity to describe ways in which their course will help students to achieve student learning outcomes, including those in Communication, and Critical Thinking. During the winter recess, and into the spring semester, the current General Education appendix to the new RIT Course Outline was crafted based largely on the Cover Page.

Design a protocol for approving Independent Study and Special Topics courses

The Committee agreed that Special Topics (ST) courses and Independent Study (IS) courses would be reviewed by a subcommittee consisting of (1) the respective college representative, (2) the Provost's representative, and (3) the chair of the GEC. The majority vote in this subcommittee determines whether any given ST or IS course is designated as a general education elective.

Update the GEC web site

The GEC web site has been updated to include the Essential Elements approved by Academic Senate at the end of AY 2014-15. The term "protocols" mentioned in this charge refers to the establishment of procedures that allow the GEC to determine whether courses are designed to support students in achieving students learning outcomes in Communication and in Critical Thinking. The aforementioned Cover Page was distributed to college curriculum committees in the fall semester, and allowed the GEC to examine this feature of courses. Starting in the fall of AY 2016-17, the General Education Committee will require all courses submitted for review to appear on the new RIT Course Outline form, Appendix A of which incorporates all of the information included on the AY 15-16 Cover Page.

Review of courses and immersions

The General Education Committee reviewed and approved over 40 courses as General Education electives; some of these courses were also designated as fulfilling a Perspective requirement. Additionally, the Committee reviewed and approved several Immersions.

Recommended charges for next year

In the normal assessment cycle conducted by the office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment (EEA), and its subsequent report to the General Education Committee, it has come to light that some classes designated as fulfilling a Perspective have not included an assignment appropriate for the assessment of the associated student learning outcome(s). This might happen for various reasons, including assignment of the course to an instructor who is new to RIT, or the evolution of the course outline and focus.

It is incumbent upon us, the faculty of RIT, to clearly articulate the student learning outcomes of our courses, to recognize which requirements students fulfill by taking these courses (said requirements serving as proxies for larger educational goals), and if need be, to revise our classification of courses as they change naturally over time so that academic programs at RIT continue to help students develop both a general breadth and a professional depth of knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking.

These things motivate the second charge recommended below, the practical meaning of which is this: The General Education Committee should provide each college with a list of its perspective-designated courses, and ask academic units to review the list with an eye toward both the definitions of the Perspectives and the student learning outcomes associated with each Perspective. Courses that are no longer aligned with the designated Perspective should be removed from the list; by leaving a course on the list, the unit reaffirms its commitment to the student learning outcomes associated with the Perspectives, their assessment in every offering of the listed courses, and cooperation with EEA.

Charges:

1. Elect a Chairperson
2. With the help of the colleges, the registrar's office, and EEA, perform an audit of General Education courses, and respond to the information as appropriate. This audit could be designed to answer the following questions:
 - a. Do Perspective courses include assignments/activities by which faculty can assess respective student learning outcomes?
 - b. Do General Education courses include assignments/activities by which faculty can assess student learning outcomes in Communication, and Critical Thinking?
 - c. Do general education courses have registration restrictions?
3. Revise the Framework document to reflect current practice (including the student learning outcomes formerly known as "orphans" that have been incorporated into the Essential Elements category).
4. Determine whether it would be beneficial to have a protocol for awarding a variance to courses that are ill-suited to assessment of the student learning outcomes listed in the Essential Elements category (such courses might include large-enrollment courses in chemistry and biology), and if so, design and adopt such a protocol.

Respectfully submitted,
Carl Lutzer, May, 2016