

General Education Committee Report to Academic Senate, 2020-2021

Membership

Josh Goldowitz, CET

Leah Bradley (Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment designee)

Beth DeBartolo, KGCOE

Patricia Diute, COS (at large)

Rebecca Edwards, CLA

Christopher Ferrari, Student Government representative

Elizabeth Hane, COS (Faculty Associate for General Education and Provost's designee)

Mike Kane, NTID

Zhijian Huang, SCB

Michael Laver, CLA (Dean's designee)

Ben Steele, GCCIS (Tony Jefferson served as substitute)

Kristen Waterstram-Rich, CHST (also ICC chair)

Tamas Wiandt, COS

Sarah Thompson, CAD, GEC chair

Ongoing Charges

The General Education Committee shall study the general education curriculum and general education course proposals from a university-wide perspective and maintain appropriate inter-college relationships with regard to general education matters. The committee will: assure that there is on-going monitoring and assessment of the general education curriculum; assure that there is an on-going review of the general education curriculum to determine any need for modification; consult with the ICC regarding procedures needed to initiate, review and approve a curriculum modification proposal; review proposed courses for inclusion in the general education curriculum; assure the maintenance and up-keep of a data base of courses that are included as general education.

- *Per D1.0, review general education (GE) courses learning outcomes and assessment.*
- *Audit/review of GE student learning outcomes and courses.*
- *Request that GEC review the results from the General Education Course Audit and make recommendations if appropriate.*

The GEC met weekly over Zoom during the 2020-2021 academic year. Meetings were held Thursdays at 11AM. Review and discussion of course proposals for General Education status comprised the majority of our business for the year. We also attempt to solve potential conflicts of interest and overlap of disciplinary expertise by contacting relevant academic units. All decisions have been forwarded to the Registrar's Office and to the respective colleges; courses and immersions are assigned appropriate tags in SIS. Immersions are also sent to the

Provost's Office and Bulletin for publication. The GEC has maintained minutes or records of each meeting.

Courses

Reviewed 52

Approved 49

Did not approve 3

Immersion

Reviewed 8

Approved 8 (Theatre Arts; Free Culture and Open Source Software; Deaf Leadership; Diversity, Inclusion, and Dialogue; Black Studies; Queer and Transgender Studies; two Biology immersions)

New charge 1: *Locate outdated references to Gen Ed/Immersion information on the RIT website and contact the owners about updating or removing the content*

GEC members are compiling links to outdated information on college websites. We will request updating by linking to the GE website hosted by Academic Affairs once that page is updated.

New charge 2: *Using results from the General Education Course Audit, make recommendations about ways to improve the student learning outcomes related to communication and critical thinking on all campuses*

See information in Appendix I for response.

New charge 3: *Propose to the Senate a revised version of Policy D01.4 that provides clarity on what the Perspectives are and what criteria are used to determine if a course qualifies. Also consider whether, for the sake of greater student flexibility, a single course could count simultaneously as two Perspectives, or whether there should be a limit on how many courses required for a student's major could also count as a Perspective*

Current policy wording is found here:

<https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/d014>

Suggested changes:

“I. Overview

The General Education Framework includes aspects that provide breadth and depth of study, and because communication and critical thinking skills are essential to the education of every student at RIT, opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement in these domains will pervade the General Education curriculum.

Breadth in the General Education curriculum is achieved through seven Perspective categories that promote different ways of knowing about the world. Courses in these categories will introduce students to fundamentals of liberal arts and sciences (methods, concepts, and theories) while emphasizing learning outcomes in communication, critical thinking, and the selected Perspective discipline(s). Courses designated in Perspective categories should bear a minimum of three credits each, and should be broadly open to the student body for enrollment. Students achieve deeper learning in a focus area by completing an Immersion, consisting of a minimum of three related General Education courses in a theme or field totaling at least nine credit hours.

II. Policy Statement on Requirements

In accordance with RIT Policies and Procedures Policy D01.1, courses considered for General Education standing will be evaluated using the criteria set forth by the RIT Student General Education Student Learning Outcomes and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Office of College and University Evaluation Policy Statement on Liberal Arts and Sciences. In particular, all General Education courses will provide learning experiences designed to achieve at least one student learning outcome in both communication and critical thinking, as described in the General Education Framework.

Because NYSED mandates a different number of liberal arts and sciences credits for different degree types and RIT's General Education Framework encompasses NYSED liberal arts and sciences requirements, each type of degree award at RIT requires a different number of General Education credits. In accordance with NYSED's guidelines, students must complete, at a minimum, the number of credits indicated in each category, as illustrated in Table 1..."

Reasoning for changes: in policy, the RIT-specific use of General Education as a term should be clarified. NYSED uses "liberal arts and sciences" because that is what the state is requiring—General Education is the term used at RIT, and at some other colleges, for the shared curricular path that incorporates NYSED's liberal arts and sciences requirements but also includes other student learning outcomes. NYSED uses "general education" to refer to broad educational policies, including for K-12 students.

The GEC does not recommend "double counting" - that a single course that may have two Perspective designations should be counted by the student in two Perspective categories. Students gain substantial benefit from the breadth and scope of classes across the Perspective categories not only because of the categories, but due to pursuing different subjects with different instructors and approaches.

Programs may already designate specific courses in three Perspective categories toward the major. As a key element of the Perspective requirement is breadth of exposure, additional crossover would be potentially problematic in that programs could attempt to prescribe additional specific courses and limit student choice as well as exposure to disciplines and experiences outside the major.

Additional work:

The GEC has been updating language for faculty regarding GEC processes, and hope to have that posted on the Academic Affairs GE webpage soon. See Appendix II.

Suggestion for charges, 2020-2021:

Review wording of the GE communication student learning outcome to address possibilities for liberal arts courses teaching languages other than English/ASL.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Thompson, GEC chair

Appendix I: Evaluation of GE audit results relating to communication/critical thinking outcomes

General Education Committee (GEC) response to charge: “Using results from the General Education Course Audit, make recommendations about ways to improve the student learning outcomes related to communication and critical thinking on all campuses.”

Background and Problem Statement

RIT’s General Education Framework is designed to give students a strong foundation in communication and critical thinking skills, also referred to as the *Essential Elements* of General Education Courses. The Essential Elements are further defined by eight General Education Student Learning Outcomes (GE SLOs), four related to communication and four related to critical thinking. For consideration in the General Education curriculum, all courses must cover **at least one** communication and **at least one** critical thinking GE SLO.

While students are not required to meet each possible communication or critical thinking learning outcome as part of their GE requirements, a comprehensive course audit revealed that some outcomes are not well-represented in terms of mapping to specific courses and subsequent assessment. Following a General Education Course Audit conducted by the GEC in AY 2019-20, it was found that only 7% of General Education courses align to the communication-related GE SLO *Express oneself effectively in presentations, either in American English or American Sign Language*. Additionally, at some of RIT’s international locations, there are no general education courses mapped to this outcome. The lack of opportunities for RIT students to practice and demonstrate mastery of this outcome is a concern.

The GEC was charged with reviewing findings from the audit and making recommendations as to how RIT should proceed.

GEC Response

The ability to communicate effectively in all forms, including giving presentations, is an integral skill for students. Similar to effective written communication, the ability to present effectively is a skill enhanced by pedagogy and practice and which develops over time. It is both a general skill and also one with discipline-specific elements. As such, presentation skills should be embedded throughout the RIT curriculum, including within General Education **and** program specific courses. The evaluation of students’ ability to give effective presentations should also occur throughout their RIT program of study. To address this gap in the curriculum, the GEC makes the following recommendations.

GEC Recommendation

We recommend that RIT both 1) further identify the scope of the issue, and 2) implement changes to ensure that RIT students have better access and opportunity to practice presentation skills in the General Education curriculum. We believe that these approaches can occur simultaneously.

Part 1: Defining the Scope

Review the Scope of the Problem: As RIT determines how to address the gap in the General Education curriculum as it is delivered, we also recommend that important background information be made available to all groups or committees charged with proposing solutions. For example, is there information which demonstrates that RIT graduates would benefit from improved presentation skills? Have advisory boards, employers, or members of the Board of Trustees made formal recommendations? This type of information would be helpful in examining the scope of the problem. At the moment, it is unclear if students are not developing needed skills in this area (and if so, to what degree), or if we are simply lacking data about student development of presentation skills because we are assessing them within a narrow selection of courses.

Review Program-Level Opportunities: Presentation skills may be fostered in the liberal arts and sciences, but are also significant within programs where students hone professional skills. We suggest investigating the degree to which students have the opportunity to further develop and demonstrate presentation skills within their program curricula. As this falls outside of the purview of the GEC, we would recommend that the ICC or a Senate committee take on this charge.

Part 2: Offering additional General Education Presentation Opportunities

Increase the Number of “Presentation” Courses and Course Sections. This could be accomplished in multiple ways. First, we recommend exploring the possibility of offering additional sections of the popular course Public Speaking (COMM 202). Public Speaking fills up quickly and seats desired usually outnumber seats available. The course provides a rich opportunity for students to practice their presentation skills throughout a semester. Additionally, departments should be encouraged to consider making more of their general education courses ‘presentation’ courses. This could be accomplished through an outreach plan which provides incentive, training, and support.

Provide Faculty Training, Mentorship, and Support. To effectively support an increase in the number of General Education “Presentation” courses, RIT must consider that faculty need to be prepared to teach and mentor students in this skill and to find ways to incorporate presentations into their courses. This requires faculty support and training. The Institute might consider the following:

- Faculty Learning Communities similar to the model used for Ethical Perspective courses in a faculty learning community led by Wade Robison
- Workshops, seminars, and/or brown bag series led by faculty with expertise in public speaking.

- Technical training that provides guidelines for including presentations in different formats such as YouTube videos or zoom recordings.
- Faculty training in best practices for accessibility in traditional individual presentation formats and in group, recorded, or video presentations.
- Faculty training in best practices for teaching and mentoring students, as well as scoring presentations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

Modify Presentation Assessment Methods. Instructors teaching courses incorporating the presentation outcome are asked to apply a rubric to a traditional classroom presentation. With expanded training and resources, students could demonstrate mastery of this outcome using a broader variety of methods such as videos, short presentations (e.g., lightning talks), or group presentations. Providing support to faculty as they develop new assessment methods and developing appropriate rubrics would be necessary but would likely pay off in student learning gains.

Support and Expand the Expressive Communication Center (ECC). The ECC is a campus resource that offers a way for faculty to add presentations as a course requirement while “outsourcing” some of the student support for presentations. Students can make appointments with communication faculty and trained peer consultants who help them prepare and rehearse for presentations.

Address Class Size Constraints. Even short presentations or group presentations can be challenging for faculty teaching larger course sections (for example, a class of twenty students each charged with a five-minute presentation equals 100 minutes of student presentations). RIT must consider the class size of General Education courses when developing solutions.

Allow Flexibility for International Locations. In order to ensure that students at the international locations have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of this outcome, each location should be able to identify General education courses that require a presentation. This provides a short-term solution to the problem. Faculty from international locations should also be provided with access to the support, resources, and training offered to faculty on the main campus.

Appendix II: Update of language for faculty, Academic Affairs GE website

Submitting a Course for General Education Approval

The General Education Committee (GEC) welcomes courses from all academic units on campus to be considered for inclusion in the GE curriculum. To meet basic requirements for RIT's general education framework, a course must fulfill all of the following criteria:

- Meet NYSED's definition of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Assess at least one general education student learning outcome in communication
- Assess at least one general education student learning outcome in critical thinking

To qualify as a Perspective course in the RIT general education framework, a course must additionally:

- Assess one or more general education student learning outcomes in the ethical, artistic, global, social, natural science inquiry, scientific principles, or mathematical Perspectives
- Clearly address the Perspective learning outcome(s) in the body of the course outline
- Typically be a 100-300 level course
- Not require prerequisites, *except* when the prerequisite is also a Perspective course in a sequence (e.g. Calculus II can require Calculus I because both are perspective courses in mathematics)

Assessment information for the general education student learning outcomes may be reviewed [here](#).

Course approval process:

The course must be on a current course outline form with Appendix A filled out. Courses must be approved by the curriculum committee associated with the proposing academic unit(s), and then by the curriculum committee of the college or center where the course is offered. Once those approvals are in place, the course outline should be submitted to the Chair of the General Education Committee by that college's General Education Committee representative. To find out who your representative is, check [here](#). When the course is reviewed, the chair of the GEC will send feedback to the proposing body and to the academic unit's

representative to the GEC. The GEC chair will send approvals to the registrar and will notify the proposing body.

If a course is returned with revisions needed for approval, the college must determine whether the course may simply be revised and resubmitted, or whether the revisions change the course content or outcomes in a way that requires curricular review at the level of the department, school, center, or college. If a course has minor editing suggested by the GEC, it will be up to the respective college's representative to determine, according to their college's expectations, whether the edits are minor enough that the course may be immediately edited or whether it needs to return to the college's curriculum committee for review before GEC approval.

If the proposed course is either a First Year Writing Course or a Writing Intensive general education course, the course will also need to be approved by the Institute Writing Committee. Courses requesting Honors status will need to be reviewed by the Honors committee.

Process for revising or removing GE status:

Courses approved by the GEC only need to return for GEC review if they are revised in a way that alters the nature of the course or the nature of the general education student learning outcomes.

If an academic unit wishes to change the status of a GEC-approved course, or change the selected general education learning outcomes, the course may be sent to the GEC through the same process as a new course. If an academic unit wishes to remove the status of a GE course, the unit should consider the potential impact on any programs requiring or utilizing the course as an elective, on any immersions with which the course may be associated, and on international campuses that may use that course as part of the GE offerings, before sending the course to the GEC through the same process as a new course.

Approval process for special cases:

If a course is a temporary offering (sometimes called a "special topic," referring to courses without documented course outlines), or if it is to be a co-listed or honors version of an existing course already approved for general education status, the course information need only go from the college's GEC representative to the GEC chair and the Faculty Associate to the Provost for General Education. The GEC chair and Faculty Associate to the provost will review the course information and return a decision via email.

Submitting an Immersion for General Education Approval

Please note that before approval, ALL COURSES within the Immersion must have been previously approved for General Education credit. Graduate courses may NOT be used in Immersions. To submit a series of courses for a General Education Immersion, the Immersion Approval Form must first be approved by the curriculum committees associated with the proposing academic unit(s), and then the college(s) or center(s) where the courses are offered. Once these approvals are in place, the Immersion Approval Form should be sent to the Chair of the General Education Committee by the proposing academic unit's GEC representative.

Criteria for Immersion Review:

- Immersions require students to complete a minimum of nine credits and three courses.

- Immersions should offer enough choices and offerings of courses for students to be able to complete the Immersion in a timely way. Proposed Immersions with very few and/or infrequently offered courses may be returned for revision and require the addition of more courses. Note that seats in a course may be reserved for students within an Immersion if there are capacity concerns.
- To ensure that students can complete an Immersion in a timely way, courses in Immersions should not include significant nested prerequisites, such that students must complete courses that are not part of the Immersion. Requiring entry-level general education courses (such as Perspectives) prior to the Immersion is permissible (e.g. first year language courses, or first year science courses).
- Disciplinary Immersions should include at least one 300+ level required course.
- If the Immersion includes courses from multiple academic units, then each unit (and college, if applicable) must approve the Immersion before it is submitted to the GEC for approval.

Revising an Immersion:

Academic units should regularly review immersion curricula to make sure listings are up to date (usually done as part of the bulletin review process each spring). To add or remove courses from an existing immersion, the sponsoring academic unit should update the immersion proposal form and send it through the curricular approval process at the college level. If the immersion involves more than one college, then the college or academic unit listed first on the immersion form should be responsible for updating the immersion and notifying other units of changes. The college's GEC representative should then transmit the amended immersion information to the GEC chair for review by the GEC.

Workflow:

Representatives to the GEC from each college should ideally be members of the college curriculum committee so that they are knowledgeable about their college's courses or immersions requiring decisions from the GEC. The college representative should transmit courses and information from the college curriculum committee to the GEC chair for consideration by the GEC at an upcoming meeting.

The college GEC representative may additionally report to their respective college as needed, and shall be a liaison between faculty or the college curriculum committee and the GEC.

The GEC chair is responsible for transmitting committee decisions to the course creator, academic unit director, college representative to the GEC, and the RIT registrar. Decisions should be transmitted in writing via email. Emails should include the number and title of the course, the status that has been approved, and the effective date, as well as a reminder that the course will be subject to general education assessment according to the outcomes selected by the course designer.

FAQ: Course Outline General Education Appendix

What is meant by "nature of the course"?

“Nature of the course” means how the course is appropriate for RIT’s GE framework. How does it meet NYSED’s definition of liberal arts and sciences? How does it fit RIT’s expectations for GE courses? If it is a history course, for example, it is sufficient to note that the state defines history as a discipline within the liberal arts and sciences. It is helpful to include reference to a discipline or disciplines recognized by NYSED as part of the liberal arts and sciences.

My course is interdisciplinary and is not specifically addressed in the NYSED list of subjects, so what do I do?

Look closely at the NYSED [list of subjects \(scroll down\)](#) and make a case for your course built on its relationship to existing categories. If the course is split over two or more categories, give an idea of how the material is distributed. Note that courses directed to professional, vocational, or technical skills are generally excluded, whereas courses that contextualize or evaluate disciplines are not: a computer science course where students learn a programming language would not meet the state definition of liberal arts and sciences, but a course on the history of computing would.

My course incorporates assignments or projects from disciplines NYSED says are generally excluded from the liberal arts and sciences. Is this allowable?

Maybe! You can make a case for it when you fill out the GE appendix. The state of New York categorizes disciplines as acceptable for liberal arts and sciences based on both historical precedent and on relationship to specific professional or vocational goals. So, are your students painting to refine their talents as painters, and will they be evaluated based on the technical skill of the work? Do they need to have developed skills as painters at the time of enrollment in order to succeed in the class? Or are they using painting primarily as a way to apply learning or express ideas? If it’s the latter, and the course material they’re applying is primarily within the liberal arts and sciences, then the course may meet criteria for GE designation.

Every student could potentially benefit from the subject of my course—isn’t that what GE means?

General education is a generic term often used on college campuses to describe a required curriculum intended to serve as a foundation for student learning and a launchpad for exploration. All colleges and universities design their own version of this framework to best fit the needs of their student population and the institution’s educational mission. In New York, the proportion of undergraduate degrees that must be within the liberal arts and sciences is governed by NYSED (New York State Education Department). NYSED requires that 50% of a Bachelor of Science degree, the most common degree earned at RIT, must be in liberal arts and sciences, a requirement we incorporate into RIT’s “General Education.” RIT offers many courses that are outside this definition (e.g. engineering, business, studio art, professional courses, etc.). A course must be in the liberal arts and sciences AND meet a communication outcome AND meet a critical thinking outcome to be a General Education option. For example, while every student would benefit from learning how to swim, that doesn’t mean that swimming fits the definition of General Education (it doesn’t).

My course could fulfill every outcome for communication or critical thinking. Should I check every box?

Unless you want to participate in assessment for every outcome, don’t check every box. Many classes suitable for inclusion in the GE framework could fulfill most of these outcomes. The boxes are to select an outcome that will be evaluated via campus-wide assessment. Most people only want to choose one in each category. Pick the one that a) is the best fit and b) you can be sure will be done in each iteration of the course, regardless of any potential changes of instructor.

How should I describe the way I will assess the chosen outcome(s)?

Make sure you are describing a good fit for the outcome you choose, and make sure it is something that is done in each iteration of the class. For example, if you choose the communication outcome related to presentations, your explanation should describe some expected parameters for how students will present material, how this will demonstrate learning, and how the presentations will be evaluated.

What kind of assessment will I be expected to do for a GE course?

This assessment is distinct from the evaluation of student work for grades. Courses included in RIT's GE framework are assessed by their instructional faculty on the general education student learning outcomes selected for the class. The process typically means identifying an appropriate assignment and scoring students according to the rubric designed for that outcome. All rubrics were developed with faculty whose teaching incorporates that outcome, and are available [here](#).

It is very useful to review the scoring rubrics for a GE learning outcome when designing the course outline, and again when planning for successive iterations for the course. That way, you can identify appropriate assignments in advance, fine tune connections between class assignments and GE learning outcomes, and/or send feedback as to how the assessment process might be improved. Assessment is meant to be meaningful in that we can see how our student population is meeting defined outcomes over time, and also as a reflective process for instructors (What worked? What didn't? Is this a valuable outcome to measure? Is there a better way to make this point or have students demonstrate this outcome?).