

**Quality Enhancement Plan
College of Arts and Sciences Exploratory Project
Summary of Planned Project**

Project Title: QEP Exploratory Project for Redefining General Education

College/Division: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)

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List of Individuals Involved:

Barbara Walvoord, external consultant

Jane Halonen

George Ellenberg

Grady Morein

And faculty and staff to be named

Brief Description of Project:

This is a pilot project in the College of Arts and Sciences to re-examine the rationale, design, and execution of General Education requirements. We will be using an external consultant to guide a select group of administrators, faculty, and librarians to develop a proposal for Gen Ed reform, targeted for completion by the end of summer, 2005. The Task Force will be charged with preparing a proposal for faculty consideration about Gen Ed reform. As such, it represents a project with a “macro” focus, which is likely to contrast sharply with other pilot projects that have targeted one specific context (e.g., COB outcomes, first year experience). However, the ability to design systems for gathering evidence of the effectiveness of Gen Ed experiences is a critical element for success in the overall university plan. Therefore, we are hoping to invest our “pilot” funding in a project that we think should have significant implications for all undergraduate programs at UWF.

Rationale:

Every university, whether under pressures related to SACS accreditation review or not, regularly should engage in a systematic review of the nature of General Education requirements as part of the undergraduate program. At UWF, General Education courses are primarily housed in the College of Arts and Sciences. As a faculty, we have not thoughtfully examined Gen Ed requirements for some time and are further constrained in our creative reforms by content area stipulations from the Board of Governors to facilitate articulation across the state. However, with the introduction of the university assessment plan that specifies five domains of skill development (content, critical thinking, communication, character/integrity, and project management), we have a fresh perspective from which to evaluate and reform our current Gen Ed requirements. We think that this lens should offer new insights about why students will

take the courses that we require. In addition, linking General Education more specifically to learning outcomes that are part of the university plan offer us an interesting opportunity to promote institutional coherence in our educational programs.

Project Student Learning Outcomes:

Defining specific learning outcomes for the General Education as well as developing a plan for faculty adoption will be the objective of the project.

Relationship to Quality Enhancement Plan Goals:

We see this step as a crucial one in helping all undergraduate programs build on a coherent skills foundation. Adherence to the university assessment domains clearly facilitates a stronger commitment to active learning strategies and should improve engagement, the primary goals of the institutional QEP.

Relationship to Academic Learning Compact Domains:

Our challenge will be to link specific content requirements with commitments from the Gen Ed faculty to contribute foundation learning experiences that promote skill development at the appropriate levels.

Specifically:

- Content – Gen Ed requirements in the state of Florida require students to distribute their hours across writing, math, social and natural sciences, and the humanities. Our Task Force will need to strategize whether there are common content-based outcomes that should guide learning experiences in the clustered content areas. In effect, Gen Ed courses may need to commit to some specific course outcomes to justify their required status, which should facilitate some interesting conversations in content areas about what outcomes are truly shared across disciplines.
- Critical Thinking – Preliminary thinking in this area suggests this domain would be a great place to house information literacy. Under Grady Morein's leadership, the faculty/staff in the library have already accomplished a great deal toward this outcome, including the development of superb online materials to help students navigate the library resources. We need some consideration of where information literacy can be systematically experienced by our students as part of Gen Ed requirements.
- Communication – Our students are obligated to complete hours in writing and math. Both areas constitute important forms of information processing and expression. We currently do not require technology performance or public speaking. We need to determine whether contemporary Gen Ed requirements need to specify these experiences in formal courses. If not, how can these appropriate "literacies" be embedded in existing curriculum?
- Project Management – Too often, faculty assume that students will learn their project management skills simply by assignment to group projects. Should we

not examine where the curriculum might be made more explicit in developing students' group abilities to reduce how much they have to learn from "hard knocks?"

- Character/Ethics – Preliminary conversations with the pilot project proposers addressing first year experiences suggest that there is an opportunity to ramp up character/ethics orientation in first year experience. Our task force will need to coordinate their ideas about the manner in which character/ethics should be addressed in the remaining Gen Ed curriculum. We think the Gen Ed ethics obligation should be to help students understand and adhere to principles of academic integrity. Again, the library faculty/staff have taken a lead in this area by crafting online training related to avoiding plagiarism that will serve as a cornerstone of the planning in this area. Should we also ask students to have a course in Ethics? Should we require that character issues should be an explicit part of humanities courses?

All of these areas would need to have articulated student learning outcomes, curriculum audits regarding existing requirements, and assessment planning. The goal of this phase of planning would be to articulate student learning outcomes and examine the implications of adopting an assessment-enhanced strategy for General Education.

Desired Student Learning Gains:

We believe that a coherent university assessment plan will help students develop a greater sense of self-regulation about the early learning. If this more coherent approach produces improved performance in General Education, we should see an enhancement of gains in the undergraduate programs as well.

Outcomes Assessment Procedures:

Defining the assessment procedures will be one of the goals of the Task Force.

Instructional Strategy Enhancements (focusing on active learning/student engagement):

Making a commitment to a specified domain in each Gen Ed course will enhance student skill development. In addition, the commitment virtually forces faculty to move to active learning strategies to promote skill development.

Assessment/Evaluation Plan:

The effectiveness of this product will be evaluated in stages as reflected by the achievements of the Task Force recommendations:

- Viability of the outcomes
- Implications of embedding outcomes in existing Gen Ed structure
- Projections of necessary curricular changes that blend state regulations and ALC structure
- Strategies for faculty engagement in Gen Ed reform

Information Dissemination and Institutionalization Plan:

The Task Force will produce a proposal at the end of summer, 2006, for the reframing of General Education requirements. We recognize that general education discussions can easily turn into a nasty enterprise. The Task Force will include explicit plans for how to promote faculty consideration, revision, and adoption over the course of the academic year 2005-6.

Resources to Be Used:

Access to Barbara Walvoord as consultant.
Faculty/staff time during summer in meetings/retreat.

Timeline for Project Activities and Events:

- A. Appoint Task Force [February, 2005]
- B. Convene meeting with Barbara Walvoord [March 8, 2005].
- C. Send delegation to AAC&U conference on Gen Ed, including Task Force members, for preliminary framing of the issues.
- D. Conduct two meetings during remaining semester to prepare the questions that must be answered [April, 2005].
- E. Conduct retreat to answer the questions [July, 2005].
- F. Provide recommendations including plans for faculty review, revision, and adoption [August, 2005].

Proposed Budget

<u>Item</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1. Consultant Lunch	100.00
2. Faculty services	3000.00
3. Books	400.00
4. Retreat expenses	500.00
5. Consultation access	
	<u>1000.00</u>
Total	<u>5000.00</u>

Benefits

We believe that this pilot study will benefit UWF in many ways as detailed below:

- A. We are overdue in a careful examination of Gen Ed requirements. Addressing Gen Ed from the lens of the new university assessment domains should provide a fresh, perhaps less threatening perspective that may help faculty rally to the need to revitalize Gen Ed.
- B. We have an opportunity to make some headway as teacher-scholars in this critically important area and could emerge as regional/national leaders if we can continue the impressive degree of cooperation in assessment planning.
- C. Students should benefit from the repeated emphasis on the skills curriculum that is oriented toward providing them a sound liberal arts education to help them adopt to the professional demands of postmodern life.
- D. This activity will lay the ground work for substantial new pilot projects in the next round dedicated to the refinement of student learning outcomes for General Education.