



UNL's General Education Reform Initiative

ACE FAQs

(1) How did this whole general education review process begin?

A brief history of recent efforts to reform general education is available at www.unl.edu/svcaa/gened/brief_history.shtml. In 2003 the Academic Senate Executive Committee met with faculty, students and administrators to learn about problems with the Comprehensive Education Program (CEP) and decided to establish an ad hoc task force to develop proposals for modifications to the CEP. That fall the Transition to University Task Force Report called for a review of the CEP. The Academic Senate eventually made a proposal, and the College of Arts and Sciences countered with another proposal. Attempts to reconcile those two proposals yielded little. In 2005 SVCAA Couture asked a group of faculty to attend an institute on general education and make a recommendation for how the campus might best reform general education. That committee's recommendations were announced by the Chancellor in his 2005 State of the University Address.

(2) What committees are working on a review and revision of general education at UNL?

There are two committees: the General Education Planning Team (GEPT) and the broader General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC). The full membership and charges of both committees is posted on the general education reform website (www.unl.edu/svcaa/gened). GEPT did preliminary work on proposals and GEAC considered proposals in detail, finally approving them by formal vote before making them available to the public.

(3) What kind of input did the committees get?

Both committees got extensive input from many campus groups (faculty, students, staff, and administrators; again see the SVCAA web site for details), from several visiting consultants, from attendance at national workshops and institutes, from other universities' programs, and from individual faculty members. GEAC routinely shared information about committee work through the website, open forums, newsletters, email messages to the campus, and GEAC members' reports to their colleges. All of this sharing brought feedback from across campus.

(4) How did the proposals themselves develop?

GEPT began with the charge that a new program would be outcomes based. This committee consulted with assessment consultants to acquire language appropriate for phrasing outcomes, surveyed general education programs across the country to detect common themes, reviewed the

existing CEP intent and ideals, and using this information, wrote proposals for consideration by GEAC. GEAC considered the proposals from GEPT, focusing on how well they could be accommodated by the various colleges, whether the wording was appropriate for assessment, and whether the range of general education objectives was addressed. Only when GEAC was satisfied with the wording and intent were the proposals approved by formal vote.

(5) How is this proposed structure simpler than the current system?

The proposed system is simpler in at least two ways: first , it offers the campus one set of common general education outcomes, defining what all of our undergraduate students should know and be able to do—regardless of their majors—by the time they graduate. Second, there is only one category of course; the present proposals incorporate both knowledge and skills while alleviating the need for two kinds of designations (i.e. ES and IS). During consultations with the campus-wide Admissions, Advising, and Retention Committee there were no concerns expressed that the proposed structure would be difficult to apply.

(6) How does this proposed plan ensure a focus on student learning rather than courses taken?

The proposed program is outcomes based. Rather than starting with what courses students ought to take, it starts with what undergraduate students ought to know and be able to do—regardless of their majors—upon graduation. The focus is on the outcomes with courses seen as opportunities to develop the necessary knowledge and abilities and as places to demonstrate their achievement of the outcomes.

(7) How does this system integrate learning within students' majors?

The proposals before you allow up to three of the ACE outcomes to be met by work within the major. In addition, Outcome 10 encourages the integrative experiences that help students pull together the various ACE outcomes and their work within their majors. Ideally, students will come to understand that breadth of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities—and the ability to use that breadth—are expected characteristics of educated individuals no matter what their majors.

(8) Why 30 hours?

The committees arrived at the 30-hour figure after reviewing many important factors. They considered the most restrictive general education options among the undergraduate colleges, colleges' varying requirements for majors and for accreditation, the minimum number of courses taken by students who are trying to “double dip,” the number that would force some breadth, and the minimum number of credits that committee members thought should be applied to each outcome. There is nothing magic about 30 credits, but this number appeared to be the most practical and workable for all of our undergraduate colleges.

(9) How can we expect our students to be broadly educated without required coursework in _____ (a foreign language, American

history, financial planning, environmental studies, nutrition and health, international studies, technology, ...)?

Every general education program struggles with this issue. Our aspirations for our students—and the varied demands their post-baccalaureate lives will place on them—are great. There is much that they should know. And of course our own commitments to each of our scholarly areas encourage us to require our students to study within each of them. In truth any general education program involves compromise. ACE is no different; it sets out common expectations while anticipating that college requirements, major requirements, and students' own curiosities will lead them to exceed these.

(10) What is an ACE course? How will courses be approved for ACE?

To date, GEAC has focused on proposals 1 and 2. A system for proposing, reviewing, and assessing ACE courses will be a part of proposals 3 and 4. GEAC will welcome suggestions on these and other issues addressed in those last two proposals, and faculty will have a chance to discuss and vote on any procedure that is developed.

(11) How can I vote on the outcomes and structural criteria when the governance policies are not known?

The Outcomes and Structural Criteria are only part of ACE. Approving them does not create a new general education program; rather it assures GEAC that we are moving in a tenable direction, allowing the committee to proceed with work on proposals 3 and 4. Nothing can be implemented unless and until all four proposals are approved. GEAC asks that you consider Proposals 1 and 2 on their own merits and in return promises to consult broadly on the development of Proposals 3 and 4. You will have additional opportunities for shaping and voting on a new general education program.

(12) Does the ACE program abandon liberal education?

No. The ACE program defines general education in terms of tangible student outcomes/accomplishments rather than mere distribution requirements. Colleges may prescribe distribution requirements, as appropriate for their students, in addition to ACE requirements.

(13) The structural criteria mandate that students take only one writing course. How can a general education program be based on so little writing?

Every ACE course must also reinforce at least one of the following as appropriate for the discipline and as identified by the department offering the course: Writing, Communication, Historical Perspectives, Math and Statistics, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Ethics, Civics, Social Responsibility, Global Awareness, and Human Diversity. While some of these courses will reinforce the skills of oral communication, visual communication, or quantitative literacy, many instructors will design their courses so that they reinforce writing skills. The structural criteria will yield significant writing experiences for students without being cumbersome or confusing. Ideally, faculty members will begin to devise innovative ways to

promote writing behaviors that help students improve their writing skills as they progress through their careers at UNL. GEAC also anticipates that courses which reinforce the other skills cited above will complement students' repertoires.

(14) Will my course be approved for Outcome 1 if I require a lot of writing?

This issue will be addressed by the governance proposal that has not yet been written. However, the GEPT and GEAC have indicated that they envision that courses will only satisfy Outcome 1 if the course has the explicit purpose of teaching writing. A content-based, writing-intensive course will be thought of as reinforcing Outcome 1. Parallels would be true for Outcomes 2 and 3.

(15) Are any academic disciplines excluded from consideration for satisfying Outcomes 4 through 7?

No. The subject areas listed in the associated Institutional Objective are meant to be viewed broadly as general categories of study, not narrowly as limiting study to specific disciplines.

(16) Are any academic disciplines excluded from consideration for satisfying Outcome 10?

No. GEAC imagines that any integrative, culminating, or capstone-like experience in any major can be used to satisfy Outcome 10, although some colleges have capstone requirements based on accreditation standards that may prevent a capstone course in one college from satisfying a college or major capstone requirement in another college.

(17) Can any of the Outcomes be assessed using objective tests?

Course content, pedagogical strategies, and assessment expectations have not yet been addressed formally by either GEPT or GEAC, and both committees welcome (and encourage) faculty input on these issues. GEAC imagines approved ACE courses as sites for developing the necessary knowledge and abilities and as places to demonstrate student achievement of the relevant outcomes. GEAC also believes that faculty are in the best position to determine how students should be helped to achieve the outcomes and how student achievement might be best assessed.

(18) How does this proposed structure accommodate students transferring across colleges?

If a student has met an ACE outcome in College A, then that student has met that same ACE outcome in College B. Proposals 1 and 2 eliminate the need for a lengthy matrix in the Bulletin which explains which courses are accepted by which colleges to meet which general education area.

However, students need to recognize that while ACE courses satisfy ACE Outcomes across colleges, they may not always satisfy college or major requirements. For example, if an ACE course is taken to satisfy both ACE and college or major requirements in one college but the

student decides to transfer to a major in another college, the ACE course may only satisfy ACE requirements but not college or major requirements in the second college.

(19) How can Structural Criterion 3 be applied when it conflicts with each college's right to set its own curriculum?

GEAC is proposing that our undergraduate colleges come together to create a common general education program for all of our undergraduate students. This common program in no way prohibits colleges from creating their own additional college requirements or major requirements. Proposal 4 will create mechanisms for the involvement of each of our undergraduate colleges in the review and approval of ACE courses and the oversight of the program. GEAC—with faculty representation from each of these undergraduate colleges—in no way seeks to limit their colleges' responsibilities and authority.

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