

Liberal Studies Reform Task Force Recommendations to the Provost October 2012

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs created the Liberal Studies Reform Task Force during summer 2012 to undertake a comprehensive study of the Operations, Outcomes, Assessment, Structure and Content of the Liberal Studies Program at Northern Michigan University.

This study was divided into three phases:

Phase I: Document alternatives for institutional operations and governance of General Education, i.e. administrative structure.

Phase II: Identify learning outcomes and develop an assessment plan.

Phase III: Identify and implement the program structure and content based on the learning outcomes and assessment plan from phase II.

This report documents Phase I whose charge was to document alternatives for institutional operations and governance of General Education, recommend the most effective model for NMU, and outline an implementation plan.

Executive Summary of Phase I: Institutional Operations

Currently, the Liberal Studies program is overseen by the Liberal Studies Committee (LSC), a standing committee of the Academic Senate. The Committee's charges include:

- Responsibility for the liberal studies component of the undergraduate curriculum. The LSC shall be responsible for the development and review of criteria for liberal studies courses and world cultures courses and shall make recommendations concerning these criteria to the Academic Senate.
- The LSC shall be responsible for reviewing and evaluating proposed liberal studies and world cultures courses and shall make recommendations concerning these courses to the Academic Senate.
- The LSC shall also be responsible for reviewing and evaluating existing liberal studies and world cultures courses on a periodic basis and shall recommend to the Academic Senate whether these courses shall continue to be offered for liberal studies and/or world cultures credit.
- The LSC shall be responsible for establishing and carrying out an outcomes assessment of the liberal studies program and shall make recommendations concerning liberal studies outcomes assessment to the Academic Senate.

The effectiveness of the committee, however, is currently constrained by two factors, as supported by comments from the Liberal Studies Committee 2012 Final Report:

- 1) the requirement that all recommendations of the LSC must be approved by the Academic Senate;
- 2) an assessment process that is voluntary, provides only composite results, lacks departmental accountability and an inability of the committee to enforce any remedies.

The Task Force completed a review of the best practices and the oversight mechanism for General Education programs at a number of comparable institutions. It was obvious that the current oversight mechanism of the liberal studies program at NMU is an anomaly to best practice; in Linda Suski's February 12, 2012, evaluative report on NMU's state of academic assessment, she identified this fact regarding NMU's Liberal Studies Program and recommended the following course of action:

Empower the Liberal Studies Committee to do its work. Liberal Studies courses that no longer address Liberal Studies outcomes or are no longer offered can now be removed from the list of Liberal Studies courses only with a majority vote of the entire Academic Senate, a cumbersome and inappropriate process that diverts Senate time and attention from more important work. The Academic Senate should establish the criteria by which Liberal Studies courses are reviewed, approved and removed, delegate to the Liberal Studies Committee the responsibility for following those criteria, and receive reports from the Liberal Studies Committee on actions it has taken, so the Senate can monitor that its criteria are indeed followed.

Task Force Findings

As a crucial part of its mission, the Liberal Studies Task Force members examined and discussed a range of General Education program structures: both from schools which the Higher Learning Commission has singled out as award-winning, and those that compare with NMU's size and mission. Through telephone interviews, it was found that:

- Eight out of eight schools used a General Education Council and an administrator (director, dean or associate Provost) as an oversight structure
- Eight out of eight schools use the Council and Director to assess and approve courses in the General Education Program
- Eight out of eight schools have an expiration cycle, typically five years, for general education courses
- Seven out of eight schools used the term "General Education" and an eighth used "Achievement-Centered"

At the Michigan State Institutions Registrar Meeting in July 2012, it was determined that the oversight of General Education at NMU was inconsistent with the practice at all other Michigan schools. In fact, one school with an oversight structure similar to the one currently in use at NMU received a substandard condition in its Higher Learning Commission accreditation. In order to remove the citation, the school was required to change to a framework similar to what we are proposing in this document. Please refer to that list and our findings below in Appendix A.

Recommended Name Change

The term "General Education" should be adopted as the title for the common learning core.

Recommended Administrative Structure

The Task Force recommends these changes to the current General Education Administrative Structure:

1. Create a new position: **Dean of General Education and University Programs**. This individual would provide administrative oversight of the General Education program and additionally, at the discretion of the Provost, this individual would oversee additional University Programs,

which may include the Honors Program, McNair Scholars/Freshman Fellows, Academic Service Learning, Work Experience/ Internships, or International Studies. This individual would have the following responsibilities:

- Provide administrative oversight for the General Education program and assessment
 - Coordinate and facilitate the work of the General Education Council
 - Manage assessment of the General Education Program, with aid from the Council
 - Implement decisions, based upon Council recommendations, pertaining to course additions and removals from the General Education Program according to its structure, goals, and assessment of learning results
 - Provide an annual report to the Provost
2. Form a new committee, the **General Education Council**. This council would replace the Liberal Studies Committee. This committee would be composed of five faculty members (one each from the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Professional Studies, the College of Business, and two at-large representatives) that would be elected to the committee by a vote of the faculty. Additionally, the Council would include both the Registrar and the Dean of General Education and University Programs as voting, ex-officio members. The Chair of the General Education Council would act as the Director of General Education, and would receive a 1/3 teaching load reduction. The Council would have the following responsibilities:
- Pursue the stated goals of the current Liberal Studies Committee (see above)
 - Participate in Gen. Ed. program assessment
 - Report recommendations to the Dean of General Education and University Programs
 - Review results of assessment of learning and all current liberal studies courses on a rotating basis (3-5 year cycle) to ensure that each course is meeting the General Education program objectives
 - Provide an annual report to the Academic Senate
 - The Gen. Ed. Council Chair responsibilities will include:
 - Forming the Gen. Ed. Council subcommittees
 - Overseeing the workload for each subcommittee regarding the Gen. Ed. course assessments
 - Maintaining the timeline for all Gen. Ed. course reviews
 - Writing and submitting reports and recommendations

Recommended Implementation

Given that the Liberal Studies Committee is in a suspended mode, as well as the need to begin Phase II, it is the recommendation of the Task Force to proceed immediately with implementation of a transition to a new administrative structure.

Rationale

This recommendation indicates the seriousness of the role of General Education on the NMU campus, and provides the authority of enforcement that the Liberal Studies Committee structure currently lacks. Additionally, such a structure would integrate the efforts of several related university-wide programs that are neither based in departments nor managed in a coordinated manner. The 2010 Higher Learning Commission appraisal expressed concern about the isolation of our various centers and programs, which have been housed in individual silos:

As the institution matures, a systemic and holistic approach to its processes may lead to improved results, better cross-department coordination, and a mechanism for prioritization of efforts in an environment of constrained resources.

The university will benefit from a more coordinated institutional effort in these [internal and external stakeholder needs] areas permitting a more efficient process for evaluating its relationships and the satisfaction level of its stakeholder groups.

Placing some of them under the umbrella of the Dean of General Education and University Programs would eliminate this concern. The chair of the General Education Council would help facilitate oversight of the General Education Program and provide substantive faculty input and direction to the process.

The Liberal Studies Reform Task Force is united in its desire to refashion the Liberal Studies Committee into an elected General Education Council. These faculty members will be voted onto the Council and serve as representatives from NMU's Academic Colleges. This structure is essential at helping provide the oversight that the program is currently lacking. Furthermore, we feel that the program needs to be placed under the direction of a full-time administrator in order to provide the authority, vision, and consistency necessary to modify and to enhance the program. Merging this position with oversight of a number of campus-wide programs aimed at enhancing recruitment, retention, and the overall academic experience would provide a coordinated approach to these currently disconnected programs, as well.

Appendix A: Liberal Studies Reform Task Force - Research on other schools

August-September 2012

School name	What is the oversight structure for the general education program? (e.g. separate unit, program director, committee - if committee oversight, can it make decisions?)	How are courses approved for inclusion/exclusion from the program?	Once approved, are courses reapproved on a regular basis?
Central Michigan http://www.cmich.edu/about/leadership/office_provost/AcademicAffairs/gened/Pages/committees.aspx	Director – ½ time; 1 course/sem is max Senate Committee – Senate has complete control over program; GEC was subcomm under undergraduate curriculum committee - now separate; Competencies (few courses in writing, speaking & math) and University Program (area requirements; revised from 9 to 8; recertifying all courses; about 25 per area)	Senate Committee is recertifying all courses; application for competencies course. Lots of courses in UP areas; few courses meet competency requirements; 4 writing intensive courses – 2 in UP and 2 others	200 courses; 5 year cycle; GEC reviews syllabi of all courses Now, review is done by faculty teaching the course; respond to questions proposed by GEC; form that faculty fills out goes to GEC
U of M - Flint http://www.umflint.edu/gened/goals.htm	Coordinator of Gen Ed – Assistant Dean in Arts & Science. Gen Ed Curriculum Committee (of the Senate) Asst Dean is an ex-officio member; Decentralized environment for course submissions	Zero -based curriculum (started from scratch) Committee (faculty only) approves program on a 5 year cycle; 400 courses; 4 general objectives with 12 learning goals;	5 year Note: 20% of their gen ed courses are web-based - verify that stat
Emporia State http://www.emporia.edu/gened	Gen Ed Office and Gen Ed Council. Council includes a Director of Gen Ed, Director of Assessment and three representatives from the three colleges. One is appointed, the other two are elected by faculty within the college. In addition, three students serve on the Council.	Courses are approved by the council. When the program started, courses were recommended for inclusion provided they met any of the listed goals for general education.	Two to three year; done by the Council
Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville http://www.siu.edu/registrar/genedguides.shtml	2009 reform called BRIDGE; housed in provost office	Dept proposes courses; BRIDGE committee approves;	5 year cycle
University of Nebraska - Lincoln http://ace.unl.edu/	Achievement-Centered Education (ACE) at U Nebraska is based upon the LEAP program, and was agreed upon and implemented at U Nebraska in 2007-08. There is no College of Gen Ed.: the University is too "decentralized" for that; therefore, ACE is housed as a Unit under Academic Affairs. 3 person group	Practically speaking, the Colleges (8 in total) designate faculty to serve on the ACE subcommittee, who review proposals for ACE courses and approve or recertify based upon learning outcomes. Thus much of the work takes place at the Dept. level: Depts have responsibility to collect data and to approve and assess ACE courses.	Courses are recertified every 5 years.
UW – Stout http://www.uwstout.edu/admin/provost/currhb/gened.cfm	Associate Vice Chancellor oversees General Education program. General Education Committee is a Senate Committee	Courses are approved for inclusion by General Education Committee.	Currently courses are not reapproved on a regular basis. Currently putting 5 years cycle in place.
Saginaw Valley State http://www.svsu.edu/academicaffairs/curriculumcommittees/generaleducationcommittee	Director of General Education is Associate Dean of College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences. General Education Committee - members get 3 hr release/year, chair gets 12 hr release/year. Reports to senate.	Courses are approved by GEC	All courses are reapproved on 5 year cycle. Reapproval requires same procedure as initial approval. No limit on number of terms
Illinois State University http://gened.illinoisstate.edu/council/	Director of General Education (Currently the Associate Dean of College of Arts and Sciences). Council on General Education which reports to the director.	Courses are approved by the Council	Currently courses are reviewed periodically but in practice are not reviewed.

Appendix A (cont.): Liberal Studies Reform Task Force - Research on other schools

August-September 2012

School name	Are there any limitations, standards or expectations placed on faculty that teach in the general education program.	Are all of the courses offered in the general education program assessed? If so, how often and who conducts the assessment?	Did the institution use another institution as their model?	Other comments?
Central Michigan http://www.cmich.edu/about/leadership/office_provost/AcademicAffairs/gened/Pages/committees.aspx	UP courses – must have faculty rank or doctoral students who have passed qualifying exams; labs can be taught by TAs Competencies – grad students and contingent can teach these;	Had not been done well in the past; new model for Gen Ed starts 2014; not an incremental change – all at once; will assess impact of changes. Use a software called WEAVE – will fax a copy. Self report data from student evaluations at graduation; alumni ratings of program; NSSE data; Performance based measures of competencies	No	Much info on website Task Force report: http://www.cmich.edu/about/leadership/office_provost/AcademicAffairs/gened/Documents/Task_Force_Report1.pdf
U of M - Flint http://www.umflint.edu/gened/goals.htm	each instructor is responsible for collecting data as evidence of learning outcomes; the data was combined at a higher level;	Tk-20 software used; they have a form for learning goals to be identified for each course. Each semester one learning goal is the focus of the assessment.		Impact report: http://www.umflint.edu/assessment/New Docs/HLC Assessment Academy/Impact Report June 11.pdf
Emporia State http://www.emporia.edu/gened/			Looked at other universities offering gen ed, but came up with their own program	
Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville http://www.siu.edu/registrar/genedguides.shtml	they have standards; unsure how they are enforced		AACU They offered an internal grant competition for proposals on a new model. This solicited numerous possibilities and more buy-in.	Gen Ed Reform stie: http://www.siu.edu/UGOV/FACULTY/BRIDGE.htm
University of Nebraska - Lincoln http://ace.unl.edu/	Whatever limitations, standards, and expectations derive from the Dept. level, where assessment occurs, and at the ACE subcommittee via recertification. Faculty must apply to teach the course as an ACE course, and the course must meet agreed-upon ACE learning outcomes goals.	CLA evaluates critical thinking, writing, reading given over 3 years to assess change in performance. Student Opinion Surveys at end of each course	It tried to do so, but, starting with a cafeteria approach, the committee decided that it would craft a new system based upon the academically decentralized nature of its University structure and a hodge-podge of LEAP and AACU criteria and vocabulary that it found helpful.	There are a lot of ways in which this program is worth a closer look, in that it started with a similar problem and seems to have addressed
UW – Stout http://www.uwstout.edu/admin/provost/currhb/gened.cfm	Once a course is approved, any faculty member can teach the course	Associate Vice Chancellor and Committee oversee assessment of the program (not individual courses). Student learning outcomes are assessed.		
Saginaw Valley State http://www.svsu.edu/academicaffairs/curriculumcommittees/generaleducationcommittee	Anyone can teach, although the ratio of tenure-earning to adjunct faculty teaching GE classes is monitored	Assessment is conducted by the General Education Committee. Assessment is of the program		
Illinois State University http://gened.illinoisstate.edu/council/	No	Assessment is by the General Education Council. All faculty teaching General Education Courses may participate in assessment.	Gen Ed Assessment process: http://assessment.illinoisstate.edu/generaleducation	