The following report proposes two options for revising NDSU’s current General Education program. The first option outlines the goals, processes, and costs required for a major revision of a campus wide program. The second option proposes how NDSU might ease into changes in the program, while acknowledging that our changing student population and dedication to continuous improvement in our programs will require a major revision at some point in the next ten years.

Enclosed:

1. Major Revision of NDSU’s General Education: Goals, Process, Options, Costs, Benefits, and Timeline
2. Continuous Improvement Plan for NDSU’s Current General Education Program: Goals, Process, Options, Costs, Benefits, and Timeline
3. General Education Reform Bibliography: A List of Resources Consulted
Major Revision of NDSU's General Education: Goals, Process, Options, Costs, Benefits, and Timeline

A. Goals
In order to succeed, planning and implementing a full-scale re-examination and revision of an existing general education program requires a significant campus commitment from the highest levels of faculty and administrative leadership. It is a multi-year, time-consuming, expensive process and campus leaders from both the administration and the faculty need to be fully committed to the process and to work to develop shared goals.

We see eight possible goals for major revision of the existing NDSU General Education Program.

1. A revision could build a GE program designed with assessment in mind. Consequently, NDSU would be able to assess student learning outcomes for the program, not just for individual courses. Closely related to improved program assessment is the need for a revised course review process organized around outcomes and outcome evaluation.

2. A revision could design a GE program focused on student learning outcomes. Our present menu-driven program is composed primarily of introductions to various disciplines. These courses focus on content, not necessarily on broader learning outcomes. Focusing on learning outcomes would also create a more assessable GE program.

3. A revision could design a student centered GE program, focusing on what NDSU graduates will need to be well-rounded world citizens, not on what departments want to teach.

4. A revision could create a GE program that provides an integrated and coherent experience rather than the present menu smorgasbord which has the structure provided by the categories, but the GE courses students take may have no common themes or approaches.

5. A revision could fully implement the recommendations of the UNIV 189 Task Force to develop a philosophy of NDSU's First Year Experience, online teaching modules, and shared resources for faculty.

6. A revision could plan a GE program in which the learning outcomes for GE and for majors are integrated. Presently, most students and faculty view GE as “something to get out of the way” before serious work in the major. It does not need to be that way if we agree on common learning outcomes that are shared by GE and by all majors.

7. A revision could create a GE program aligned with NDSU’s mission and vision. Our mission and our students have changed considerably since the present GE system was put in place and it is not clear if the present program meets the needs of our present student body or if it is aligned with the campus mission and vision.

8. A revision could ensure a continuing commitment to assessing and coordinating GE by creating suitable infrastructure with an office with a director and staff.

B. Process
The process could begin with planning to apply to the 2009 AACU GE Institute in Minneapolis. The Provost will need to approve this application and appoint a five person team. At the GE Institute, the team might design a proposed revision process to be subsequently approved by the Provost, the GE Committee, and the University Senate. The watchwords nationally about such a process are that it needs to be transparent, inclusive, student-focused, faculty-driven, and campus specific.

C. Options
There are at least six General Education elements prominent in the national discussion which NDSU does not have. In alphabetical order those are: civic engagement, critical thinking, ethics/social responsibility, first year seminars, information literacy, and interdisciplinary upper division GE courses. We strongly recommend evaluating how each of these would help NDSU meet and assess the student learning outcomes the campus agrees upon.
D. Costs
Financial costs will vary tremendously, depending on support from the President and Provost. The AACU General Education Institute in Minneapolis costs $6500, plus transportation for the team. Expenses for a GE Task Force such as release time, retreats, etc. could total $20,000 each year for four years. Depending on the nature of the proposed GE revisions, faculty development targeted toward new or revised courses could be from $100,000 to over $300,000. Implementing a coherent, integrated, assessable GE program at NDSU will necessitate a full or half-time GE Director’s Office with access to staff support. This could cost $50,000 to $120,000 per year. Finally, any major change such as this runs the risk of possible campus turmoil, disruption, resistance, and backlash from faculty and administrators.

E. Benefits
We see at least five likely benefits from a major revision of NDSU’s GE program.
1. A GE program with assessment as a major goal will be helpful, even perhaps essential, for the next accreditation cycle. We were fortunate in the last accreditation visit that the accreditation team did not examine our assessment of General Education. We do not advocate depending on luck next time. The CLA exam provides excellent nationally normed data on the extent to which a sample of our students meets typical general education outcomes. Unfortunately, given our menu-based GE program, it does not provide the specific feedback needed to “close the loop” for assessment and continuing improvement of student learning.
2. A major revision should promote dialogue on campus among faculty, students, administrators, and alumni about what common learning outcomes we expect from all undergraduates.
3. A major revision should stimulate innovative courses and teaching which can both attract students and increase faculty excitement about teaching.
4. Such a revision could bring campus focus back to undergraduate teaching. This is our “bread and butter” and the source of increased student numbers in recent years. The data from OAIR suggests that tenure track faculty are putting their time and energy elsewhere.
5. A successful major revision should lead to a more integrated, coherent, intentional, and aligned GE program that is focused on intentional teaching and learning. Such a program should better prepare our students to be well-rounded professionals and could help attract and retain high quality students and faculty.

F. Timeline
In order to meet the AACU General Education Institute’s deadline of February 20, 2009, the Provost will need to approve the application and appoint a five-person team quickly. The AACU Institute is at the University of Minnesota from May 30 to June 3. After attending the institute, the team will prepare recommendations to present to the Provost and the GE Committee in the late summer of 2009. In fall 2009 the team will present those recommendations to the campus. Also in fall 2009 the Provost will appoint a GE Task Force that includes representatives from the significant campus constituencies. During the 2009-2010 academic year the GE Task Force will design the GE revision process and make recommendations to Provost and campus for that process. During the next two academic years, 2010-2012, the GE Task Force will follow the revision process, starting with a foundation of assessable student outcomes. The Task Force will present its recommendations to the University Senate in spring 2012. Faculty development will begin in summer 2012. In the 2012-2013 academic year, depending on the extent of the changes, the GE Task Force will either pilot newly created programs or begin implementation.
Continuous Improvement Plan for NDSU’s Current General Education Program: Goals, Process, Options, Costs, Benefits, and Timeline

A. Goals
Should NDSU decide that the time is not yet right for a major revision of the General Education program, the program still requires change in order to meet the needs of our changing student population, best practices in contemporary undergraduate education, and the necessity of program evaluation. Although such changes will still require time and money resources, a smaller group could undertake this work, and initiate agreement for proposed change.

The goals of this change would be to move NDSU’s general education program to one more in line with our university’s current mission and students. Four goals for change would be possible to implement without extensively altering the current hybrid program that includes both student learning outcomes and a “menu” approach allowing students to choose courses from a menu of options:

1. Development of a more assessable program. Although assessing our undergraduate curriculum is important in terms of accountability and accreditation, equally important is the continued improvement of our programs that can only come through gathering internal data on student learning. Our program, as currently implemented, relies upon individual teachers assessing individual courses. Closely related to stronger assessment is better program oversight, including updating our course review practices, focusing review processes on outcomes and outcome evaluation.

2. Support (professional development opportunities and recognition) for faculty designing and teaching gen ed courses. Offering opportunities for faculty to become even better teachers of their general education courses: pre-semester training, pedagogical lunches, gen ed focused peer review, and workshops to help faculty with the burden of general education paperwork.

3. Incorporation of more vertical integration of student general education experience. Offering and requiring more upper-level courses would discourage the attitude that gen ed is a burdensome add-on to real education. We need to integrate the students’ experience at all level of the curriculum.

4. Implement 189 task force goals. We want to assure that the excellent work undertaken as part of the 189 taskforce is not lost, but that the recommendations of the taskforce are implemented and aligned with the overall goals of NDSU’s gen ed program.

5. Investigate new interdisciplinary courses. The campus might consider developing new interdisciplinary courses, such as “Thinking Like a Scientist” that would be designed for students who are not majoring in the sciences.

6. Vision for long-term program growth and responsiveness. A large program, such as NDSU’s, requires a full time program director to enable continued improvement in program design and delivery.

B. Process
The most important step of this process would be hiring or appointing an appropriate director of general education to lead the general education committee and interested faculty through prioritizing goals and creating action plans for achieving them. The same watchwords that shape a larger general education reform would be equally important here: transparency and inclusion, with focus on faculty concerns and student learning.

C. Options
The above goals would drive the options. One important option would include revisiting our learning outcomes so they would reflect contemporary practices in general education. NDSU
would benefit from attending the AACU General Education Institute to begin the long term planning that would go with maintaining the present program and easing into change.

D. Costs
The costs of this sort of revision would be significantly less than that of a major revision; however, updating our current program would not be a cost-free endeavor. The cost of a program director could vary from $20,000 a year for time-buyouts for an existing faculty member, to $80,000+ for a fully benefited faculty line permanently associated with this position. Although in the short-term, the buyout option may seem preferable; a dedicated position and budget seems essential to sustaining a vibrant program, and institutionalizing NDSU’s commitment to the importance of general education. In addition should sending a team to the AACU General Education Institute seem a useful option, that will cost $6500, plus transportation for the team.

E. Benefits
There are six main benefits to reworking our current general education program:

1. Preparing the campus for change with less initial time and financial commitment than a major revision will ease participants into the activity required for major change. Although a major revision will probably be necessary in the next ten years, slowly developing the pieces that would lead the campus through this revision would ease us toward change.

2. Beginning a conversation with the campus about our shared commitment to general education will encourage greater interest and involvement once those changes come.

3. Offering development opportunities to teachers will create more faculty who are knowledgeable and able to lead general education reform when that happens.

4. Developing a more assessable program will not only prepare us for external accreditation, it will help us gather data to make data driven decisions for our campus as we move forward with major revision in the next 5-10 years.

5. Employing the proposed changes of the 189 taskforce will assure those members of campus who work on gen ed revision that their recommendations are both heard and necessary for change.

6. Adding the position of a full-time director not only brings our program into alignment with practices in our peer institutions, the position brings continuity, vision for the future, and leadership for change.

F. Timeline
Whether or not NDSU would send a team to AACU for planning, the university needs to appoint a director and a committee by summer to begin planning work. After project definition and planning, the GE group would need to appoint working groups on outcomes, program assessment, and professional development. The revised program should be running by fall of 2011.
General Education Reform Bibliography:
A List of Resources Consulted

Published Materials


Unpublished Materials and Meetings

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