

Agriculture, Food Systems, and Natural Resources Department Meeting Summaries

- Our present GE is too broad. We need to focus on lifelong learning with a core for everyone and then maybe a secondary level that is more flexible.
- Students think current GE classes are too compartmentalized. We need to make the effort to show students how classes are related to each other. We need to make sure faculty members are making connections more obvious to students.
- It is also important in early Gen Ed classes like 189 to really grab students with exciting topics. Expose them to areas they have not considered for their major. We don't want to pigeon-hole students who are entering university.
- The best classes take students outside their comfort zone.
- **What about the idea of having a Gen Ed core? Should we have theme-based courses designed for non-majors? Students learn to argue both sides of a question. We need to help them learn how to engage in constructive discourse on controversial topics.**
- Gen Ed provides breadth of education, as distinguished from specialized training. Students may not see the value of global perspectives until engaged in the workplace.
- General education should provide a diverse education with high expectations.
- Feedback from employers indicates that writing is a problem for both NDSU undergrads and grads. They have poor writing skills compared to their peers.
- I'm fully in favor of students having both some sort of "how to write" class (akin to current requirements) and then additional writing practice in classes that are writing (communication) intensive. I think the writing intensive classes let you "get to the good stuff" that the student is interested in, while giving them practice in the type of communications that are most appropriate to their major. I don't see why we couldn't have requirements of a basic class plus one or even two of these writing intensive classes that could be general or could be high-level classes in the student's major.
- Students should be competent in all six components of communication writing, speaking, reading, listening, observing, and illustrating.
- Writing is important for students, e.g being able to write a formal letter/email to apply for a job. Faculty members see problems with subject-verb agreement, punctuation, basic structure of sentences and paragraphs.
- Given how hard it is to grade writing if you are teaching a big class could we get students to critique each other's writing?
- Some institutions have courses with major writing components identified with a "W" suffix and a certain number of "W" courses are required. In this way, writing skills are emphasized repeatedly throughout the undergraduate curriculum.
- The quality of student writing (in upper division classes) is a general source of frustration. Too many students reportedly receiving an "A" grade in ENGL 120 but are not able to write in a senior capstone course.
- Writing is a key and also cross-disciplinary courses to stimulate integrative thinking.
- Are we spoon-feeding students too much? They need to develop the ability to be self-starters. They need to be responsible for their own learning.

- Are we pushing them enough to generalize the big things they have learned across their courses? Can we come up with a few concepts that we stress across the curriculum?
- Might we create cohorts of students that take a set of classes together?
- What about team-taught classes? How can we encourage faculty to work together to develop a successful and interesting course.
- What about a gen ed class that provides overview of all sciences?
- We spend too much time worrying about content in our classes: content is the enemy of learning.
- NDSU tends to believe that content is everything, i.e. if we could only get student's to memorize all this information they will succeed in the workforce. Really we need to spend more time getting them to understand that the world is complicated and that most important issues have no straightforward answer.
- It is also very important for students to learn what is a reliable source of scientific information.
- In addressing what NDSU could do better, we might run into problem of stepping on people's toes. Are people protecting Gen Ed classes that serve the needs of their dept. rather than needs of students? A good Gen Ed revision should be willing to step on people's toes.
- Given that issues have become so divisive in the USA might be good for students to learn how to facilitate discussions among people who have very different perspectives on a particular issue, e.g. health care. Facilitation teaches you to approach the problem in a logical manner, i.e. create a roadmap that leads to a more friendly discussion, with respect for viewpoints of others. Kansas State has an excellent program to teach faculty to be effective facilitators on controversial topics.
- A second language should be required. We need to prepare our students for global interaction-- understanding different cultures, knowing how to interact with people from different backgrounds.
- All NDSU students need to develop a commitment to lifelong learning. We should have a class focusing on how to do this and what it means in an organized way. Students should also learn critical thinking skills. They need to understand ethics. We need our graduates to be open-minded, to accept different ideas and cultures. This is especially important for this part of the world where our graduates need to be able to work with people from other parts of the world.
- Employers tell us they are happy with the science part of the curriculum, but that graduates need to be able to understand and speak the language of diversity. They need to be comfortable with different individuals. They need to understand global culture both as consumers and producers. Graduates need to be good at critical thinking and problem-solving under pressure. They need to be leaders, someone who can make a difference, who can take information and use it to make a difference, to make things better.
- **Maybe we should have a senior experience similar to 189 where students demonstrate their abilities to find information and solve problems.**

- I do like the idea of a “cornerstone” course to start our majors out on the right foot modeled after the capstone that we currently use to finish off the major. I think a good deal of the practical, major-specific information that is sometimes deficient in our undergrads could be addressed there. It could be developed to prepare students for the learning outcomes that we intend in our upper division classes and could also cover professional development in the field.
- Additional emphasis is needed on core skills such as mathematics and literature rather than low-level composition.
- Understanding philosophical issues and thinking should be required of all students.
- We should address issues at the upper level that require students to apply essential learning skills – create this culture on the campus.
- Graduates should be able to discuss the traditional areas of philosophy, politics, religion, and distinguish between rational and irrational arguments.
- Gen Ed contributes to better thinking (higher order) skills. Gen Ed includes tools to help students become better global citizens. Gen Ed includes skills needed to succeed in the workplace. After graduation, employers want students to be good employees and citizens, not just good technicians.
- Global perspectives should extend beyond just a single class and could be embedded into several courses, including those in the major.
- What about a “Great Books” program?
- Students in 400-level classes are not well prepared. Example student shortcomings included basic understandings of references (what constitutes an appropriate reference, citation style, usage, etc.), general knowledge of how to write, critical and creative thinking, ability to differentiate between good and bad “knowledge”, teamwork, and ethics. General writing abilities are a major problem.
- There should be multifaceted support for General Education. If it is important, the best teachers should be identified to teach the courses and they should be provided with adequate support (including compensation and recognition). We could have endowed professorships for a period of three years for the best instructors teaching General Education courses.
- Graduates should have the ability to make an argument and to apply what they have learned.
- The high ratio of students to faculty at NDSU is too high and compromises learning. A parallel concern was that faculty are currently stretched too thin and that people who give a lot of their time to teaching need to be told that “This is good.”