General Education: Delivery, Resource, and Structural Challenges
Themes from GETF Discussions and Interviews with Current and Former General Education Council Members (Fall 2007)

Faculty Involvement/Interest
• Important to acknowledge instructors’ contributions to Gen Ed
• It’s too intensive to appropriately train TAs, adds to work load.
• It takes time to create a good Gen Ed course, particularly when it is a large course and you are working to address a variety of Gen Ed learning objectives.
• Faculty need support and opportunities for development of course – release time and other support are important.
• It’s hard for faculty to see how their course fits into the General Education Program; focus is much more on the academic department.

TA Support/Allocation
• There is great variability in level of TA support/availability by Gen Ed designation and School/College
• There are problems with the current funding system/process – who decides what courses get TAs? What criteria are used? How are decisions connected to ensuring quality Gen Ed experiences for students and instructors?
• There are few rewards for TAs teaching Gen Ed – rewards come from research assistantships
• Lack of training for TAs, lack of support for faculty who work with TAs on instructional development and assessment process.

Department & Dean Interest/Support
• Mixed departmental commitment to offering quality General Education courses – what’s in it for them?
• The importance of “ownership” by Deans and Chairs (e.g., “what would it take to create a ‘star’ Gen Ed course in your department?”)
• Importance of departmental acknowledgement of contributions of Gen Ed instructors
• Departments are balancing multiple needs – Gen Ed, the major, graduate courses, etc.

Large Classes
• Large classes make teaching for some learning objectives (e.g., writing, critical thinking) challenging if not impossible (partially without adequate TA support).
• There is no incentive for teaching large classes and they are very time consuming to teach – particularly when trying to teach to certain Gen Ed learning objectives.
• To support their development, students need some small class experiences; first-year students in particular can get lost in big classes
• Administrative rewards go to offering large classes, not small

Communication/Public Relations
• Need a centralized source of information (website)
• Lack of clarity about the purposes of Gen Ed
• Lack of clarity of Gen Ed’s benefits to students
• Need to communicate goals and purposes of Gen Ed at course level
• Faculty don’t know much about Gen Ed
• How do we sell Gen Ed – to students, to faculty, to advisors, to the public?
• Advisors need to help communicate benefits of Gen Ed to students
• How do we communicate relevance of Gen Ed to students?

Quality of Course Experience
• It takes particular skills to teach a Gen Ed course well – and most faculty do not receive support/training to do this.
• Need to have multiple instructional development opportunities for TAs and Faculty
• Need to communicate purposes of Gen Ed at the course level (in syllabus, etc.) – why is Gen Ed important, how this course addresses Gen Ed purposes, etc.
• Provide examples/information on how to communicate and address Gen Ed goals in courses
• Need to reward and celebrate excellent General Education course experiences.
• Get departments to compete to offer “star” Gen Ed courses
• What processes would help ensure quality Gen Ed course experiences? (e.g., Student Feedback, Council Role)

Course Review/Monitoring
• Departments don’t always cooperate with the Gen Ed review process
• Difficulty of keeping up with demands/volume of Quinquennial reviews
• Questions about the potential gap between the course as originally proposed and approved, and what is actually taught/delivered.
• Tension between monitoring quality/maintaining standards, and encouraging projects within in Gen Ed instruction
• Better orientation for Council members on review criteria, process, etc.
• Develop clearer, more focused, evaluation criteria, expectations for courses and course proposals
• The Council has no “carrots”

GE Courses Serving Multiple Purposes
• Courses that serve both General Education students and major preparation present challenges to students and instructors: Gen Ed students can feel like second class citizens, instructors can find it challenging pedagogically, but also has instructional benefits – allowing for student-to-student learning)
• Upper-level students in introductory courses are a pedagogical challenge, especially when course is designed to help prepare first year students
• What do the wide range of Gen Ed courses have in common for students? - What should all Gen Ed courses offer?

Gen Ed Leadership
• There is no point person for General Education – no champion
• Who is in charge of Gen Ed? There is a lack of systematic overview and monitoring of the Program. Who is responsible for Gen Ed?
• There is a lack of clarity about who decides about TA support and teaching assignments — there is a lack of consistency in decision making.
• In whose interest is it to deliver the Gen Ed Program?
• To what extent does a faculty member own a course?
• Lack of consistency and clarity in funding – people have different goals/priorities at various levels within the system – how can Gen Ed funding support the teaching mission of departments and institution-wide educational goals?

Assessment
• What curricular and structural changes will facilitate the proposed student learning objectives – what structural factors impede student development of these objectives?
• Develop increasing clarity about the specifics of the learning objectives – what types of student performance provide evidence of those objectives?
• It’s important to develop a student learning outcomes assessment strategy (perhaps focused on Writing and Critical Thinking) to clarify extent to which the Gen Ed program is meeting goals for student learning

Requirement Rigidity
• Lack of room for students to pursue their own educational interests (e.g., take more advance course to meet designation, explore an area in depth)
• Lack of new and innovative courses
• Develop “themes” or strands of courses
• Are there other ways for students to gain competencies/experiences besides through course taking – e.g., demonstrating competencies in portfolios, other ways?

Gen Ed & Major
• What is the relationship between the Gen Ed learning objectives and expectation within the Major? What role does the major play in facilitating these objectives?
• Some students mention difficulty in making links between Gen Ed and major, others say they later saw a connection; Some students picked up a minor or switched majors based on Gen Ed experience

Incentives for Gen Ed
• There are no structural benefits to Gen Ed.
• There are no “carrots” for Gen Ed participation
• For whom are the rewards – individual instructors? Departments?
• What rewards are available? Do they work to promote/support Gen Ed quality?
• Types of possible incentives: tenure/merit, departmental recognition, release time

Capacity to Meet Learning Objectives
• How to meet Writing and Critical Thinking objectives in large classes with inadequate TA support
• How to meet diversity objectives in non-diverse classrooms
• No labs
• Not diluting the educational experience – making it challenging