

SPECIAL REPORT

of the

ACADEMIC MATTERS, GENERAL EDUCATION, PROGRAM AND BUDGET AND
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION COUNCILS AND THE RULES COMMITTEE

concerning

THE INTEGRATIVE EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

On September 17, 2009, the Faculty Senate adopted Sen. Doc. No. 10-002A, SPECIAL REPORT of the ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL, AD HOC COMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT, GENERAL EDUCATION COUNCIL, RULES COMMITTEE AND UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION COUNCIL concerning REVISIONS TO THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST. With respect to the Integrative Experience component of these revisions, the following directive was stipulated:

“Integrative Experience: This new requirement is for a 3-credit upper-level course. The specific parameters of this requirement will be determined by the General Education Council during the Fall 2009 semester and recommended to the Faculty Senate for enactment.”

Sen. Doc. 11-XYZ is the General Education Council’s response to this directive, now submitted to the Faculty Senate for final enactment.

Purpose Statement: Upper Division Integrative Experience

“Integrative learning comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various setting; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and, understanding issues and positions contextually.”

(Statement on Integrative Learning, Association for American Colleges and Universities & the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, March 2004)

The upper-division integrative experience (IE) provides a structured context for students to reflect on their own learning and explore the connections between the broad exposure provided by General Education and the more focused exposure of their major.

Preamble

The undergraduate experience can be a fragmented one. Students fulfill a set of General Education requirements, fulfill another set of requirements for the major, and take various electives. They also participate in a range of extracurricular activities. Too often they see these components of their undergraduate education as unconnected and disjointed rather than experiencing them as an integrated whole that helps prepare them for a lifetime of learning.

The skill of integrative thinking, however, takes practice and focused attention. We know that current research into the process of learning highlights the challenge that novice learners face in making connections among seemingly disparate sets of information and experiences. Students require structured learning experiences to become integrative thinkers. They need multiple opportunities to draw on their previous learning, apply previous and new knowledge and skills to increasingly complex problems and discipline-based settings, and reflect upon how the various components of their education can help shape their future engagement in professional, civic, interpersonal, and intellectual activities.

The Integrative Experience (IE) requirement at UMass Amherst addresses the challenges associated with educational fragmentation. Positioned in the upper-division, the IE provides students with a structured opportunity to look back on their early college learning experiences, reflect upon and make connections between those earlier experiences and the more advanced work in their major, and use their integrated learning to prepare for the demands of the world beyond the University.

IE Criteria

The IE addresses the goals by fulfilling each of the following three criteria:

1. Providing a structured, credited context for students to reflect on and to integrate their learning and experience from the broad exposure in their General Education courses and the focus in their major.
2. Providing students with the opportunity to practice General Education learning objectives such as oral communication, collaboration, critical thinking and interdisciplinary perspective-taking, at a more advanced level.
3. Offering students a shared learning experience for applying their prior learning to new situations, challenging questions, and real-world problems.

These three criteria are the key ingredients for proposals to meet the IE. At the same time, it is important to note that there are many different upper-division and credit-bearing formats, options, or structures that can be proposed and approved, in light of the three key criteria.

IE Options

Programs, majors, departments, Schools or Colleges will be expected to themselves offer or arrange with each other to offer various options for satisfying the upper division Integrative Experience requirement. The upper division Integrative Experience (3 credits) will complete the General Education requirement for students, and responsibility for options will be located with programs, majors, departments, Schools or Colleges that offer undergraduate majors. Proposals for the Integrative Experience can include (and are not restricted to) the following options as long as they are designed to address the three purposes of the integrative experience and are designed as upper-division offerings for 3 credits.

1. Departments/majors design new courses to meet the IE requirement;
2. Departments/majors revise existing courses to assure that the three learning objectives will be addressed. These might include existing capstone courses in the major, revised as necessary to meet the IE objectives;
3. Departments/majors collaborate with other departments/majors to develop new interdisciplinary collaborative (or other) offerings that address the IE learning objectives as well as the objectives of the cooperating majors;
4. School/College-wide or Campus-wide collaborations focus on a multi-disciplinary theme with multiple instructors and disciplinary perspectives (using the newly designated campus number "UNIV 394");
5. Departments/majors develop umbrella crediting mechanisms that stipulate the IE learning objectives and the basis for faculty review, grading, and credit, for IE options such as student portfolios, theses, independent or group projects (In the case of independent student projects or theses, the IE learning objective that involves "shared learning experience" can be met, for example, through a seminar that parallels the research and writing of the thesis, or a conference or some other shared learning experience that enables students to present, discuss, and provide feedback to each other on their independent projects);
6. Service learning or community-based learning activities, field experience, practica, or internships that are designed to address the IE objectives.
7. Other options that meet the three [IE criteria](#) are welcomed for review by the General Education Council and will be reviewed in light of those criteria.

Illustrations of these options are available on the Gen Ed Website – www.umass.edu/gened

IE Timeframe

Year 1

2010-2011, departments/majors are encouraged to develop pilot courses, seminars or other credit-bearing IE options for review by the General Education Council. These pilots may be offered as major requirements or electives for the pilot period.

Year 2

2011-2012, departments/majors will submit new or revised courses or other credit-bearing IE options to fulfill the IE requirement, and be prepared to implement these options for their upper-division transfer majors.

Year 3

2012-2013, departments/majors will be prepared for full implementation for juniors (if their implementation plan is scheduled for juniors), with 2013-2014 full implementation for seniors.

IE Funding

The funding amount for the Integrative Experience course will be \$300 per student, as recommended by the Program and Budget Council and agreed to by the Deputy Provost, representing the central administration. It is understood that some departments may wish to offer an integrative experience course as a service to other departments, that some departments already have a course that could be adjusted at some additional cost to incorporate the integrative experience, and that some departments will have to develop such a course from the ground up. With these factors in mind, the \$300 per student funding should be allocated in a fair manner among departments, recognizing that actual costs may vary from department to department. The central administration will report annually on the allocation of IE funds to the Program and Budget Council. It is also expected that, over time, IE funding will be increased if the costs of providing this program at a high level of quality increase.

IE Approval Process

IE proposals from academic units (programs, departments, schools, or colleges) will be vetted by a subcommittee of the General Education Council, which will include the Chairs (or designees) of the Undergraduate Education Council, Academic Matters Council, and the Program and Budget Council, in addition to members of the General Education Council appointed by the Chair of the General Education Council. Once approved by the IE subcommittee, IE proposals will be voted by the full General Education Council and then approved by the Secretary of the Faculty Senate and the Provost (or designee). If an IE proposal involves a new course, it may be submitted for initial approval as an experimental course and then, at a later date, submitted for permanent approval through the full course approval process.

Limitation on Courses from a Student's Major Department which satisfy General Education Requirements

Currently, "Students may count no more than one course in the major (as recorded at graduation) toward General Education requirements" (Sen. Doc No. 85-024B, Section IV.F). This stipulation is repeated in the "Overview of Requirements" at the end of Sen. Doc. No. 85-024B: "VII. Students may count one and only one course in their major as a General Education Course." Since it is envisioned that most students will fulfill the IE requirement by taking a course in the major, and since it is not intended that the current practices of (1) counting one course in the major department towards the fulfillment of General Education requirements and (2) of allowing one course in the major to count toward Diversity, be altered, Sen. Doc. No. 85-0234B is hereby amended as follows:

Section IV. F:

“Selected upper level courses may be allowed to fulfill General Education requirements. In addition to the Integrative Experience and Junior Year Writing, students may count one course from the major department (as recorded at graduation) toward General Education requirements, with one additional course allowed to count toward Diversity.”

GENERAL EDUCATION PROPOSAL: An Overview of Requirements

VII. “In addition to Junior Year Writing and the Integrative Experience, students may count one course from the major department (as recorded at graduation) toward General Education requirements, with one additional course allowed to count toward Diversity.”

This amended version of Sen. Doc. No. 85-024B shall be recorded in the Faculty Senate repository of documents as Sen. Doc. No. 85-024C.

MOVED:
39-11

That the Faculty Senate approve the criteria for the Integrative Experience: (1) providing a structured, credited context for students to reflect on and to integrate their learning and experience from the broad exposure in their General Education courses and the focus in their major; (2) providing students with the opportunity to practice General Education learning objectives such as oral communication, collaboration, critical thinking and interdisciplinary perspective-taking, at a more advanced level; and (3) offering students a shared learning experience for applying their prior learning to new situations, challenging questions, and real-world problems, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 11-039A.