

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	TA Support/Allocation	Department & Dean Interest/Support	Large Classes	Communication/Public Relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to acknowledge instructors' contributions to Gen Ed • It's time 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large classes make teaching for some learning objectives (e.g., writing, critical thinking,) challenging if not impossible (particularly 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Course Review/Monitoring	GE Courses Serving Multiple Purposes	Gen Ed Leadership	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 experiences • What processes would help ensure quality Gen Ed course experiences? (e.g., Student Feedback, Council Role) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 participation 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" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses that serve both General Education students and major preparation present challenged 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 <u>common</u> for students? - What should all Gen Ed courses offer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <u>departments</u> and <u>institution-wide</u> educational goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What curricular and pedagogical structures 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	Gen Ed & Major	Incentives for Gen Ed	Capacity to Meet Learning Objectives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	