

Strategic Directions for General Education

At Bowling Green State University

A White Paper

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Foreword

In July 2003, Provost John Folkins asked the Co-Directors of General Education for an update on the status of general education at BGSU and, in light of the Academic Plan, the General Education Committee's proposed future directions. This document is a response to Dr. Folkins' request. Outlining the progression of the Committee's work over the last four to five years and the Co-Directors' work over the past two years, the White Paper provides present and future directions for reform. Because general education belongs to the entire University, not just one college or segment of the undergraduate student population, the committee endorsed distribution of this document for commentary to the entire University community. The Co-Directors held three open forums for the University community and met with more than ten groups, including the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the Committee on Academic Affairs, Enrollment Network, Arts & Sciences Chairs and Directors, Arts & Sciences Council, and Deans Council as well as with representatives from the College of Musical Arts and Firelands. Those meetings and forums influenced the revision of this White Paper. To move ahead with this next phase of curricular revitalization, the Co-Directors asked for endorsement of the proposed future directions outlined here from the General Education Committee. The General Education Committee endorsed the White Paper with friendly amendments that are included here. The next step is to seek endorsement from Undergraduate Council in spring 2004.

The first Working Paper proposed a name change for general education. A name change has been a point of discussion for many years among a variety of University constituencies, without consensus or resolution. In 2002-03 the General Education Committee agreed in its Future Vision Statement (Appendix A) that a name change was necessary to reinvigorate the program and emphasize its new focus and directions. The consensus of that committee was that the new name should be built around concepts connoting centrality, vitality and the foundational nature of general education. The Co-Directors proposed BG Key eXperience as the new name. After extensive meetings with the campus community, the decision was made to drop the name of BG Key eXperience. This is not to invalidate the need or enthusiasm all round for a change in name and identity for the program. The Co-Directors, in consultation with many groups on campus including the Provost office and BGSU Marketing and Communications, set out to develop a new name and image for the program. The new name will be chosen from among the following five options*:

- BGSU Perspective: 21st Century Liberal Studies
- BGSU Advantage: 21st Century Liberal Studies
- University Studies: The BGSU Advantage

* As of April 15, 2004, with sufficient input gathered from multiple constituencies, the choice for the name will most likely be *BG Perspective: 21st Century Liberal Studies*.

Students of Liberal Studies at BGSU are EMPOWERED through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills, INFORMED by knowledge about the natural, social and cultural worlds and forms of inquiry basic to these studies and RESPONSIBLE for their personal actions and for civic values.

General Education and BGSU's Mission

General education at BGSU is designed to provide a premier liberal arts foundation leading BGSU students to graduate prepared for self-reliant learning throughout life and effective participation in a democratic society. General education classes, taken by all students at BGSU, must reflect a deep conviction by the BGSU faculty that successful, satisfying lives require a wide range of intellectual and applied skills and knowledge. Ethical integrity, reflective thinking, and social responsibility are characteristics of a liberally educated person. The general education experience at BGSU strives to offer a solid foundation for deep and active learning by providing students with both vital intellectual skills and breadth of knowledge to be successful in their major area of study and later in their chosen professions. These intellectual skills include the ability to think critically and communicate effectively; understand different cultures and modes of thought; participate actively in learning as a path to effectively leading others; and investigate forces and values that shape the social, artistic, scientific and technological complexities of contemporary culture.

General education at BGSU is committed to enabling students to explore their vocations as well as their careers. "Vocation implies more than earning a living or having a career. The word vocation implies having a calling: knowing who one is, what one believes, what one values, and where one stands in the world."¹ A liberal education providing opportunities for students to find their vocations as well as future occupations acknowledges the contemporary and future nature of work and leadership in this society and the world. Flexibility, adaptability, independent and critical thinking as well as excellent written and oral communication skills are the qualities most prized by employers in the ever-changing and evolving work world of our global economy.² Employers, narrowly and broadly defined, will look for these skills in employees in equal if not greater value with specialized knowledge and abilities. Further, these same employers will expect from employees competencies in multiple literacies including technical and information literacies, media literacy, and computational literacy, to name a few. BGSU undergraduate students who fully participate in general education, their major and minor areas of study and the

rich residential and student life opportunities available to them during their time here will be poised and ready for gainful and fulfilling careers, creative opportunities or advanced study.

General Education Reform

The proposed changes in this document are aligned with a national movement to strengthen general education in the U.S. In 2000 the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) assembled a panel of top education, private sector, public policy, and community leaders analyzing higher education in this country today. In 2002 this commission of experts issued the report *Greater Expectations: The Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College* (www.greaterexpectations.org). The authors contend that

[the] key to successful reform is a clear focus on the kinds of learning that students need for a complex world. The panel urges an invigorated and practical liberal education as the most empowering form of learning for the 21st century. The panel calls for higher education to help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives.³

An integral argument in the panel report is that intentional learners need to become empowered, informed and responsible learners as well. The three qualities are defined as

EMPOWERED through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
INFORMED by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
RESPONSIBLE for their personal actions and for civic values.⁴

The broader literature on general education reform in the U.S. describes what is now considered an outmoded model of thinking about liberal studies curricula:

The old idea equated general education with breadth and, in an institution organized around academic departments, involved a sampling of courses from a broad array of academic disciplines. The method of securing breadth was by means of distribution requirements, and students were typically given a great deal of latitude to choose among alternative courses within broad domains of knowledge, such as the humanities, social, and natural sciences.⁵

Problems with this distribution model abound. A typical general education program at that time was fragmented because it lacked a shared campus philosophy, unifying theme, and centralized administrative oversight. In response to this problem, many institutions underwent reform of their general education programs in the 1980s. Institutions came to the realization that general

education needs to have a unique place in the curriculum and must be more than a “sampling” of courses randomly administered. Specifically, institutions have come to understand that general education programs ought to have more ambitious goals, curricular coherence, and centralized oversight. After twenty years of attention to general education in higher education, most institutions have taken measures to improve and update their programs. General education mission statements, for example, now articulate several common goals, two of which follow. Students should

- acquire specific skills of thought and expression, such as critical thinking and writing, that should be learned “across the curriculum” and embedded within several courses.
- learn about another culture and the diversity that exists within our own culture in terms of race, class, age, and religion.⁶

While some institutions, like New York University, the University of New Jersey and Ohio University, have taken radical approaches to general education reform through the elimination of distribution models, other highly successful programs have taken a more evolutionary approach. Temple’s Core Curriculum, for example, has kept a limited distribution model as a framework and has gradually developed and added common courses that all students take. BGSU, another example of an institution taking an evolutionary approach to reform, employs a modified distribution model. That is, students are able to choose among a variety of courses with some specific requirements. All BGSU undergraduates take, within a distribution framework, English 112, at least one course with an international perspectives component, and one cultural diversity course. General education courses must also promote intellectual skill development and active learning. The gradual inclusion of these elements over the past twenty years has changed students’ general education experience at BGSU.

Current Directions and General Education Reform at BGSU

Continuing an evolutionary approach to improve the program and to align it with the contemporary understandings of general education outlined in *Greater Expectations* is the most judicious way to enhance the current program. Such an approach is the least disruptive to the curriculum, departments, faculty, and students and is most expedient.

In 2001, the General Education Program completed a program review. While the review committee noted several programmatic strengths as well as problems with the lack of resources allocated to the director and program, the review committee also recommended several significant changes. The recommendations ranged from improving the program’s cohesion and developing effective communication strategies among faculty and program staff to increasing development opportunities for faculty teaching general education courses and including general education among the President’s annual priorities and strategic future directions.⁷ In 2001-02, the General Education Committee began working on an action plan to address concerns raised in the program review. This action plan became the foundation for the General Education Committee’s

vision statement, “Future Vision of General Education at BGSU: A Response to the Academic Planning Team” (Appendix A).

In that response to the Academic Planning Team, the Committee proposed imperative future directions for general education as well as indicators of a successful program. The Committee, in their written response, contended that general education at BGSU would be a priority only when the following goals are achieved:

- An emphasis will be on intellectual skill development in concert with disciplinary content in all general education courses.
- Exposure to different modes of inquiry will introduce students to the idea that inquiry varies from discipline to discipline. In learning about different modes of inquiry, students will acquire breadth of knowledge not only in content, but in how disciplinary content is acquired and prioritized by the scholars and researchers of a particular discipline.
- Students will develop multiple literacies. In the context of the General Education Program, “literacy” carries its meaning of “being knowledgeable and possessing appropriate skills in a subject or field.” Literacy acquisition central to our students’ education includes but is not limited to technological and informational literacies, media literacy, environmental literacy, literacies in the arts, computational literacy, and scientific literacy.
- Students will have plentiful opportunities in large and small classes to engage in active learning.
- Students will have increased access to smaller general education courses.
- Courses designed primarily to introduce students to a major or discipline must also fulfill the goals and learning objectives of general education. If this is not possible the designation of these courses will be altered. In these cases the General Education Committee will explore alternatives with the affected department or program.
- Assessment will be an integral component of courses and the program as a whole.
- A full-time director will be appointed.
- The purpose of the reformed General Education Program must be clear to students, faculty, administrators, advisors, and parents. A culture change needs to take place: the entire campus community and interested outside constituencies need to begin viewing general education as foundational and vital to a BGSU student’s education as opposed to the prevalent attitude that general education courses are a nuisance to “get out of the way.”
- The General Education Program offers a signature experience for BGSU students, setting it apart from general education at other institutions.

In that same response to the Academic Planning Team, the Committee purposefully emphasizes the connection between the program’s goals of intellectual skill development and the University Learning Outcomes, which follow:

- Communicate skillfully, in
 - writing and
 - presenting;
- Think critically and constructively, through
 - inquiry,
 - creative problem solving, and
 - examination of values in decision-making;
- Engage others actively and effectively through
 - participation and
 - leadership.⁸

While the Academic Planning Team did not endorse all of the General Education Committee's ideas presented in the "Future Directions" document, it did recognize the significance of improving general education at BGSU and specifically endorsed vital proposed directions:

We [the Academic Planning Team] support several ideas now being examined by the General Education Committee, and encourage their expeditious consideration and implementation. Several examples show the transformative potential:

- The General Education Committee recommends a shift in emphasis from the distribution model that has been in use for many years to an intellectual skills model that is already established in the General Education philosophy and learning outcomes.
- A focus on modes of inquiry will introduce students to the idea that inquiry varies from discipline to discipline. In learning about different modes of inquiry, students will acquire breadth of knowledge.
- To stress intellectual skills, assessment will be an integral component of courses and the program as a whole. Introduction to discipline courses will not be included in the General Education curriculum unless they meet the General Education learning outcomes. Faculty development opportunities will be provided to support these changes.⁹

During the 2002-03 academic year, the General Education Committee worked towards meeting many of these goals suggested by the Academic Planning Team. The General Education Committee focused on the intellectual skills component of the courses under review, using the review as an occasion to begin conversations with department chairs and representatives about their expectations. Courses lacking evidence of opportunities for intellectual skill development and active learning have been put on "conditional approval." The Committee will work closely with these programs to seek *realignment* of the goals of these courses to meet general education expectations or alternatives will be sought out with these programs.

Further, the University has made progress in making the General Education Program a priority. Two initiatives in particular are notable: the College of Arts & Sciences Small Classes Initiative that ran in fall 2003 and will again in fall 2004 and the General Education Faculty Learning Community. The Committee is pleased to acknowledge that these two initiatives are commendable beginnings particularly because each has provided faculty development forums aimed at improving the coherence as well as the quality of general education. Faculty development has not been a central focus to curricular improvement in the past; however, the General Education Committee with support of the Academic Planning Team propose that faculty development and support is vital in general education reform. Information about the two initiatives is appended (Appendix B).

Programmatic Goals: Strategic Directions

The BGSU General Education Program will continue its evolutionary approach to reform through an emphasis on inquiry in the disciplines, a renewed focus on intellectual skill development that complements disciplinary course content, and the inclusion of a new outcome: critical thinking about values. Securing permanent leadership for the program is also a priority. Two other initiatives currently in place—the A&S Small Classes Initiative and linked general education courses for first-year students administered out of the Office of Student Academic Achievement—serve to enhance students’ first year experience and student learning. Both initiatives provide increased opportunities for students not in formal learning communities to make connections with other students at the University.

Inquiry in the Disciplines

General education courses will include in their course structure some approach to inquiry in the disciplines. Students will either study inquiry in a discipline or they will participate in it at a basic level. For the General Education Program, inquiry is defined as the process through which a discipline creates knowledge. That is, it concerns a discipline’s methodologies and intellectual approaches, its ways of approaching a problem, asking questions, finding acceptable answers, and organizing information and knowledge. Exposure to various approaches to inquiry across different disciplines and fields will introduce students to the idea that inquiry indeed does vary from discipline to discipline and field to field. In music instruction, for example, inquiry is referred to as “reflective thinking” about music history, theory, education and performance. In the sciences, for example, the scientific method is the common mode of inquiry. The Academic Plan identifies inquiry as one of three central attributes, along with engagement and achievement that are pervasive in everything BGSU does. Further, the Academic Plan proposes that, in general education classes, intellectual inquiry should receive attention, just as factual content already receives attention. Many courses in the General Education Program already focus on inquiry as we have very broadly defined it. In fact, the existing learning outcomes for the intellectual domains and intellectual skills already emphasize this approach (see Appendix C). Through faculty development, continuous review of our program, and assessment of student learning, this aspect of the General Education Program will be strengthened.

Intellectual Skills and Liberal Education

An overarching principle of the revision of our General Education Program is a reshaping of the role of liberal education which

. . . erases the artificial distinctions between studies deemed liberal (interpreted as not related to job training) and those called practical (which are assumed to be). A liberal education *is* practical education because it develops just those capacities needed by every thinking adult: analytical skills, effective communication, practical intelligence, ethical judgment, interpersonal skills, and social responsibility. The new practical liberal education also empowers those who possess it.¹⁰

Further, C.G. Schneider and R. Shoenberg from the American Association of Colleges and Universities assert that “the liberally educated person . . . needs not only substantial knowledge but also the skills and awareness to negotiate. . . ‘a world lived in common with others.’”¹¹

While students may select from a variety of courses to gain an understanding of inquiry and vital content across disciplines, the intellectual skills are the common thread that will unify the General Education Program. Strengthening the intellectual skills component and providing increased opportunities to practice these skills while delivering essential course and disciplinary content will bring more curricular coherence to our students’ general education experience.

Critical Thinking about Values

The BG eXperience initiative shares many of the same objectives as the General Education Program and in fact general education courses have formed the academic base of that program from its inception. Compelling literature on general education reform makes the case that “strong general education programs are self-consciously moral and political in nature. . . General education is obviously and necessarily based on assumptions--explicit and implicit--about what is important, worthy, and valuable.”¹²

BGX is a set of university initiatives launched to integrate critical thinking about values into the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students, afford students rich opportunities for values enactment, build relationships and spaces that facilitate serious discussion of ethical issues, and foster civic engagement. In its second year, BGX is showing potential for providing a powerful unifying theme for education at BGSU, creating a unique institutional identity based on student-centered learning in which values, civic engagement, and character development are central. BGX and the General Education Program have the potential for providing a genuine signature experience for BGSU students, an experience that will be recognized across Ohio and the region for exceptional general education and first-year student programs.

In the near future BGX and the General Education Program may become parts of one program. It makes sense that these two related and central university-wide programs begin to share an identity, resources, and even facilities, especially given the current budget climate. In particular, this plan links the General Education Program to BGX through the sharing of one specific university learning outcome:

- Think critically and constructively, through
 - inquiry,
 - creative problem solving, and
 - *examination of values in decision-making.*

Within the next two-three years the General Education Committee will work on possible integration of a values requirement in the General Education curriculum.

Leadership

An internal faculty search for a new director of General Education is taking place in spring 2004. The new director will have oversight of the program and lead the proposed evolutionary reforms over the next four years. This person will be a tenured, full-time BGSU faculty member who will teach for his/her department, but for whom his/her primary responsibilities will be to advance general education reform and work closely with the General Education Committee to assure control of quality and integrity of the general education experience at BGSU.

In addition to the new director, it is imperative that each department or program that participates in general education appoints a coordinator of general education. For departments with multiple sections of one course this faculty appointment is especially critical. The new director will work closely with the departmental coordinators and the General Education Committee to ensure the quality and goals of general education are reflected in all courses and continue to do so even when new instructors teach the courses.

Because BGSU relies on a modified distribution model to deliver general education, strong programmatic leadership along with an emphasis on intellectual skill development are needed to improve curricular coherence for students and prevent curricular drift in courses already approved.

Catalog Copy: The Next Phase (05-06 Academic Year)

General Education

All students take 9 courses

- ENG 112
- Inquiry in Cultural Diversity in the US (1)
- Inquiry in Natural Sciences (2)
- Inquiry in Social and Behavioral Sciences (2)
- Inquiry in Humanities and Arts (2)
- Elective in one of the four domains above (1)

*One course in the Social and Behavioral Sciences or Humanities and the Arts must be an International Perspective.

All general education courses will focus on at least one of the general education learning outcomes and the learning outcomes for its knowledge domain. Incorporation of a variety of the learning outcomes is encouraged and expected for most courses.

General education student learning outcomes:

Intellectual Skills

- Communicate skillfully with appropriate vocabulary, in,
 - reading
 - writing, and
 - presenting;
- Think critically and constructively, through
 - inquiry,
 - creative problem solving, and
 - examination of values in decision-making;
- Engage others actively and effectively through
 - participation and leadership

Though all outcomes should be incorporated in a general education course to some degree, a course may vary in its emphasis of the learning outcomes. For instance, a course that stresses writing skill development may place less emphasis on leadership skill development.

Future Steps in the Evolutionary Reform of General Education

The Co-Directors noted during their campus-wide discussions common themes for additional future directions in this evolutionary process of general education reform. Because the current general education curriculum contains an elective, there is room to make further changes without completely disrupting the existing framework.

University-wide Math (Computational Literacy) Requirement:

In the first version of the Working Paper, a mathematics requirement was proposed to take the place of the current elective. The driving force behind this change was to bring BGSU into compliance with Ohio Board of Regents (OBOR) standards. However, it remains unclear at this time whether a university-wide math requirement that makes BGSU compliant with OBOR should be considered a course that all students take or a proficiency level all students must demonstrate. Further, it became apparent that many constituencies thought it problematic to require math at this point in time primarily because general education math classes have not yet been developed and many students would end up in an introductory Algebra class to meet the requirement. This predicament does not meet the spirit of a university wide math (or computational literacy) requirement. The concept of a university-wide computational literacy requirement should remain at the forefront of future General Education reform. This requirement should probably be considered a stand alone requirement common to all, like ENG 112, for example, and no longer be considered a replacement for the elective.

Replacing the General Education Elective

The elective requirement could be evolved into a broadly defined knowledge domain that would enrich students' experience by exposing them to offerings in other colleges including and beyond Arts and Sciences. Some ideas for this new requirement (knowledge domain) included a capstone experience linked to capstones in the majors, an "applied" course (e.g., technology literacy, environmental literacy, information literacy), or a service learning experience. All of these choices could be conceived of as second-year and beyond experiences for students. This requirement would consciously build upon the rich first-year experiences offered by BGSU, such as BGX, UNIV 100 and first-year living and learning communities.

International Perspective and Cultural Diversity in the U.S.

Additionally the General Education Committee is looking at ways to strengthen the international perspective requirement. A subcommittee of faculty members dedicated to international studies is forming to work on strengthening the international perspectives learning outcomes and to better define what an international perspective should be for our students. Further, constituencies who teach the cultural diversity in the U.S. classes have voiced concern that the "United States" designation is too confining, being out of step with globalization and Diaspora studies. The Cultural Diversity Subcommittee should be reconvened to work on these issues and help improve General Education reform.

These future steps, which will not be resolved in this phase of development, are ones that the University community will need to explore, debate, and decide for the next major phase in this incremental development of a new General Education program for BGSU.

Implementation and Resource Issues

Resources are critical to the success of any signature academic program, and BGSU Perspective is no exception. The principal resources required fall into two categories, leadership and staff to develop and sustain the program and high quality instruction and well-prepared faculty to provide instruction. The Provost has authorized support for a tenured or tenure track faculty member to become a full-time director of general education. This individual—who will report to the Vice Provost for Academic Programs—will hold a fiscal year administrative appointment, giving him/her the time to focus on program development and administration. A search is underway, and a new director will assume his/her duties in July 2004. To provide necessary support for the director and the General Education Committee, the Provost will assign a half-time secretary to assist the director and the General Education Committee.

Faculty resources are also critical to the success of BGSU Perspective. A goal for the program is to offer more small general education courses taught by tenured and tenure track faculty. These provide especially rich environments for developing the skills identified in the general education learning outcomes, establishing strong relationships between faculty and first year students, and creating a signature program. Embracing the goal of expanding offerings of small general education classes does not mean that large lecture classes will cease to be an important part of general education. Not only do fiscal realities make them necessary, but they can be effective in achieving general education learning outcomes—especially when enhanced by small weekly break-out sections, well-conceived labs, and other strategies that promote active learning. In the short term, support from Success Challenge can fill gaps in staffing created by augmenting the number of small classes for first-year students—which was done in the 2003-04 academic year to support the small class initiative. In the longer term, additional tenure track lines are vital to provide better staffing for general education courses as well as advanced undergraduate and graduate courses. Given the emphasis on general education in the Academic Plan and the role that document plays in resource allocation, departments who contribute significantly to general education are well positioned to compete for new positions that will enhance their ability to offer high quality general education courses and alleviate tensions between staffing and supporting general education and delivering courses in the major or graduate program.

Opportunities for faculty development will be made available to departments, programs, and faculty to assure that the courses included in the curriculum meet the goals of the General Education Program. Additionally, a revised review process for current and proposed new courses will be put in place. Programmatic assessment of student learning will be established. Those courses put on “conditional approval” in the last review of general education courses will

have the opportunity to revise those courses so that they meet the goals of the program. The Committee and the Director of General Education will work closely with these programs to realign the goals of these courses or explore other possibilities.

Timeline

Academic Year 2004-2005:

- The new director will be selected.
- The General Education Program will participate in OREG in summer 2004 so that students and parents learn more about the significance of liberal education at BGSU.
- BGX courses are expanded to 60.
- BGX and the General Education Program are integrated with shared resources and facilities.
- To promote a grassroots approach, the director will improve collaboration and communication with departmental general education coordinators.
- The General Education Committee will work with the College of Arts and Sciences to remove current obstacles that occur when a General Education course does not meet A&S Group requirements.
- The General Education Committee will form subcommittees to implement key developments including but not limited to assessment and review of proposed and existing courses
- Continued faculty development opportunities for general education instructors will be explored, including the possibility of another learning community in 2004-05 and additional teaching-learning workshops.
- Programmatic assessment tools, including ePortfolio (in consultation with the ePortfolio Steering Committee) will be piloted by strategic groups. Programmatic assessment tools will be developed in 2004-05 and piloted no later than fall 2005.
- The General Education Committee will promote a campus-wide dialogue about the next phase of the curriculum reform (e.g., should the elective become a required math course or applied course or something else altogether?).
- A new name and image for the program will be in place for Fall 2005.

Academic Year 2005-2006:

- A signature name for the revised program will be in place.
- All printed materials will reflect new name by catalog deadline in February '05.
- Every registration and orientation talk across campus will use the new name and explain the purpose and significance of the program.
- Continued faculty development opportunities for general education instructors will be made available.

- New curriculum modifications proposed by departments and programs currently on conditional approval will be reviewed.
- Additional appropriate faculty development opportunities will be made available.
- Evaluation of programmatic assessment tool pilots, including ePortfolio, will be completed. Programmatic assessment will be ongoing.
- Next phase of curricular reform will be decided. Implementation planning will begin.
- Work toward making a values course a requirement in the General Education curriculum.

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APPENDIX A

Future Vision of General Education at BGSU: A Response to the Academic Planning Team Fall 2002

Why does General Education need to be an integral component in the Academic Plan?

As all BGSU undergraduate students must complete the General Education requirement, efforts to improve their General Education program will positively impact their learning and engagement throughout the undergraduate experience. Because the program has such a broad influence on student learning, it can tie into all of the themes proposed by the Academic Planning Team from outcome-driven learning to digital media.

What contributions does General Education make to BGSU's mission?

The program statement clearly details the contributions that General Education makes to BGSU's mission:

General Education provides a premier liberal arts foundation leading BGSU students to graduate prepared for self-reliant learning throughout life and effective participation in a democratic society. General Education classes, taken by all students at BGSU, reflect deep conviction by the BGSU faculty as well as of leaders in all professions, that successful, satisfying lives require a wide range of skills and knowledge. Ethical integrity, reflective thinking, and social responsibility are characteristics of a liberally educated person. General Education at BGSU offers a solid foundation for active learning by providing students with both vital intellectual skills and breadth of knowledge to be successful in their major area of study and later in their chosen professions. These skills include the ability to think critically and communicate effectively; the ability to understand different cultures and modes of thought; and the ability to investigate forces that shape the social, artistic, scientific and technological complexities of contemporary culture.

In theory, the program has a sound philosophical statement and strives to reach its goals. In practice, however, the focus is commonly reduced to distribution requirements for various reasons, from lack of adequate support to lack of faculty recognition for teaching General Education courses.

What changes does the Committee recommend to highlight the significance of General Education at BGSU?

In an attempt to solve this problem and to stress the intellectual skills component, the General Education Committee has been piloting course-embedded assessment of student learning and is now encouraging academic departments scheduled for review to complete course-embedded assessment in lieu of the course-approval forms. The General Education program is also willing

to pilot BGSU's e-portfolio system. Additionally, the General Education Committee is poised to build on the work of the previous director and committees and to move in new directions.

Arts and Sciences has funded faculty incentive grants for faculty interested in aligning course objectives more closely with the General Education learning objectives. In fall 2003 approximately 100 sections of General Education and large lecture Arts and Sciences classes will be offered in 30 student sections to all new Freshman, beyond English composition. Small class size will contribute to retention, student engagement, and student learning.

The results of all of these pilots will inform future directions for General Education. Recently, the General Education Committee agreed to change the name of the program, a change they believe will symbolize a shift in emphasis. Instead of the learning community at BGSU equating General Education with a distribution model, the Committee intends to use this opportunity to stress the intellectual skills component already established in the General Education philosophy and learning outcomes.

The name receiving the most favorable reception at the moment is **University Core**, but the Committee continues to explore further possibilities. Examples from other institutions include

- Curriculum 2000 (the name of Duke's program after a major general education reform),
- Miami Plan (a distinctive name for general education courses plus some additional courses at Miami U in Ohio),
- Inner Core, Middle Core, and Outer Core (Illinois State U's general education structure based on learning as a developmental process), and
- Foundation.

Why is General Education so important?

The Association for General and Liberal Studies encourages general education programs to cultivate "the recognition and understanding of the connections among disciplines, the coherence among ways of knowing, and the essential relationship between general studies and areas of specialization." C.G. Schneider and R. Shoenberg from the American Association of Colleges and Universities assert that "the liberally educated person . . . needs not only substantial knowledge but also the skills and awareness to negotiate what philosopher Maxine Green has called 'a world lived in common with others.'" BGSU's current program statement reflects both of these views. In its practice, however, the program must undergo a major shift in emphasis to reach its full potential.

In addition to the goals outlined in the current statement, the General Education Committee suggests other potential elements as well as some revisions. These suggestions need considerable discussion and work but reflect the Committee's overall beliefs:

- An emphasis will be on intellectual skill development, not simply knowledge transfer.
- A focus on different modes of inquiry will introduce students to the idea that inquiry varies from discipline to discipline. In learning about different modes of inquiry, students will acquire breadth of knowledge.

- Student will develop multiple literacies. In the context of the General Education program, “literacy” carries its meaning of “being knowledgeable in a subject or field.”
- Students will truly have opportunities in large and small classes to engage in active learning.
- Students will have increased access to smaller General Education courses.
- Introduction to discipline courses will not be included in the General Education curriculum unless they truly meet the General Education learning outcomes.
- Assessment will be an integral component of courses and the program as a whole.

The Committee contends that General Education will truly be a priority at BGSU when most or all of these expectations are met:

- A full-time director is appointed.
- Faculty development is available to support the shift in emphasis.
- More tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty and full-time instructors and lecturers teach General Education classes.
- Success in teaching General Education is recognized in tenure, promotion, and merit. Otherwise, there will be little incentive for faculty to improve or make changes.
- Departments offering General Education courses hire, when a position becomes available, a new faculty member committed to teaching General Education as outlined in the General Education program statement.
- The purpose of General Education is clear to students, faculty, advisors, and parents, and it is not simply described as a list of requirements to be checked off.

References:

Association for General and Liberal Studies. (2001). Retrieved October 28, 2002, from the Association for General and Liberal Studies Web site: <http://www.bsu.edu/web/agls/>

Schneider, C. G., and Shoenberg, R. (2002). *Contemporary Understandings of General Education*. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from the Association of American Colleges and Universities Web site: <http://www.aacu.org/publications/ContemporaryUnderstandings.cfm>

APPENDIX B

Arts and Sciences Small Classes Initiative

In fall 2003 approximately 100 sections of General Education and other selected large lecture Arts and Sciences classes are being offered in 30 student sections to all first-year students, beyond English composition. Affectionately known as the “Q” classes, all classes in this initiative are taught by full-time tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, lecturers or instructors. Small class size, we believe, will contribute to retention, student engagement, and heightened student learning. Faculty development was paramount to ensure the success of this large-scale initiative. In May 2003 the College of Arts and Sciences sponsored an all-day workshop conducted to help faculty prepare for developing and teaching their fall small classes. The workshop focused on active/student-centered teaching and learning, technology in the classroom, incorporating writing into all classes, and an in-depth introduction to the demographics, cultural dispositions and personalities of our first-year students.

In August 2003 two faculty development sessions were held. The first was a make-up orientation for those who could not attend in May or who had not yet been assigned at the time of the May workshop. The second was a luncheon for all instructors as a follow-up to discussions started in May and to discuss assessment plans for the initiative. Expansion of faculty development opportunities such as workshops and learning communities need to be extended to all faculty to help change the academic culture to inquiry-learning based.

General Education Faculty Learning Community

In support of BGSU’s new Academic Plan, the Provost’s Office, Arts and Sciences and CTLT are sponsoring a unique learning opportunity for BGSU faculty. For the 2003-2004 academic year, general education faculty have been invited to participate in a learning community that will focus on an important general education goal: to develop the intellectual skills and abilities that make self-reliant learning possible for all students. Some examples of those skills and abilities include thinking critically, communicating effectively, understanding different cultures, and investigating forces that shape contemporary life. Instructors who participate in this learning community will explore teaching strategies designed to increase student learning and engagement in general education courses. The faculty learning community, which will comprise eight to ten faculty members and a facilitator, will meet for approximately two hours a month throughout the academic year. In these meetings, the learning community members will share ideas and teaching strategies in addition to participating in planned workshops on a variety of topics. Members will redesign a course or integrate a teaching project into an existing class or curriculum. The ultimate benefit of participating in this community is learning about and sharing creative pedagogies and integrating them into courses to enhance student and instructor satisfaction.

APPENDIX C

Intellectual Knowledge Domains

International Perspective

The General Education Program has an International Perspectives requirement that explores the significance of diverse cultures and addresses international issues and connections. At least one of the courses from either the social and behavioral sciences or the humanities and arts must contain an international perspective. Courses satisfying this international perspective requirement are marked with an asterisk (*) in the General Education course list.

IP Learning Outcome:

- Articulate the significance of diverse cultures and their modes of thought.

General Education Learning Outcomes for each Knowledge Domain:

The Social and Behavioral Sciences

Identify issues and problems and to formulate and frame these in ways that contribute to their solution.

Learn how theory is applied to events to produce knowledge.

Examine the nature of decision making in society from the perspectives of the social sciences and how values impact on that decision-making.

Construct and present an argument, identifying the evidence that supports it and the reasoning process by which a conclusion is reached.

Articulate the bases of evidence in this discipline how it used, and the assumptions on which it rests.

The Natural Sciences

- Develop the skills and practice of using quantitative and qualitative approaches to study scientific concepts.
- Learn to understand the nature of scientific evidence, how it is obtained and how it is used in the scientific process.
- Solve problems using the logical approach of science.

The Humanities and Arts

Depending on whether this is an art or humanities course you will learn the following:

- Utilize modes of inquiry appropriate to the disciplines in question and explore the subject's connection to human values.
- Develop fluency in verbal and non-verbal communication through reading, writing and listening.
- Critically understand the role of language and media: their rhetorical, artistic and symbolic expression and the ways in which these expressions both reflect and influence culture and society.
- Examine the social and cultural context of art works arising over a variety of historical periods.

Cultural Diversity in the United States

- Utilize modes of inquiry into the ways ethnic cultures have shaped American life.
- Identify issues and problems in cultural diversity from the perspectives of diverse cultures and locate yourself in your own culture.
- Engage in critical inquiry into the problems, challenges, and possibilities inherent in a multicultural democracy.
- Develop skills of communication, analysis, and problem solving through active participation.

All general education courses taught at the 300 and 400 level integrate two or more disciplinary perspectives on the topics, issues or problems under consideration in the course, and require extensive writing, reading and research. It is suggested, although not required, that students complete at least one University general education course at the 300 or 400 level.

Writing Proficiency

Recognizing that the ability to communicate in writing is a valuable skill and a hallmark of an educated person, each student enrolled in a baccalaureate or associate degree program must complete satisfactorily ENG 112 or give evidence of proficiency in written expression equivalent to that attained by the student who completes this course. No student can be excused from meeting this requirement, nor can the requirement be postponed.

The courses and services designed to aid students in meeting the writing requirement are coordinated through the General Studies Writing program. The English Placement Test, administered through this program, assesses the writing skills of entering students. On the basis of this test, students are placed in ENG 110/110S (Developmental Writing), ENG 111 (Introductory Writing) or ENG 112 (Varieties of Writing). A student may be required to take two or three of these courses, but no more than six hours of credit earned in these courses may be applied toward graduation. The writing proficiency of students is evaluated at the end of each course until students have reached the University proficiency requirement expected upon completion of ENG 112. Students who receive transfer credit for English composition and communication courses taken elsewhere may be tested for writing proficiency if it is not clear

that they have completed a course equivalent to ENG 112. Students who wish to be exempted altogether from English composition are also tested for writing proficiency.

Special courses and services designed to aid international students in improving their English proficiency are coordinated through the program in English as a Second Language. Upon reporting to the University and before registering for classes, all entering international students admitted through the Office of International Programs and the Office of Admissions, except those whose native language is English, are required to take on-campus proficiency tests; international students transferring from other colleges and universities in the United States as well as students from Puerto Rico are also required to take these tests. On the basis of these tests, the University reserves the right to place students in ENG 100 (English as a Foreign Language I), ENG 101 (English as a Foreign Language II) or courses designed to develop the students' oral skills in English. A student may be required to take one or both of these courses, but no more than four semester hours of credit may be applied toward graduation. The English proficiency of students is evaluated at the end of each course until the students have reached the level of English language proficiency expected for admission into ENG 110. The University also reserves the right to require enrollment in the special section for international students of ENG 110 if the student has no transfer credit for the course.

To encourage all students to pass ENG 112 prior to the beginning of the junior year, three credit hours are added to the graduation requirements of students who pass ENG 112 after accumulating 60 credit hours; four hours to the graduation requirements of those with 90 or more credit hours.

The following are exempt from this penalty: Students transferring to BGSU with 31 or more credit hours, provided that ENG 112 is passed within the first 30 credit hours earned at BGSU after the transfer, and

International Students who transfer to BGSU with 21 or more credit hours and for whom English is a second language. Exemption from the penalty must be recommended by the director of international programs and ENG 112 must be passed within the first 40 credit hours earned at BGSU.

General Education Committee 2003-2004

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Dani Moler	USG	2005
Neal Jesse	Appointed	2004
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Marcus Sherrell	Appointed	2006