

August 23, 1994

MEMO TO: Curt Smith,
Chair, Curriculum Council

FROM: Charles Corr

SUBJECT: Report of the General Education Committee

I write to comment on the Report of the General Education Committee dated May 2, 1994. I do so as a person who has spent the largest portion of my career at SIUE over the last 29 years teaching courses within our General Education Program, and as a former member and chairperson of the General Education Committee.

In principle, this is an excellent report which should receive careful attention from and action by SIUE's faculty and administration. I wish that I could be confident that it will receive that attention and action.

The report puts into written form much of what we know and have known for some time about the current General Education Program at SIUE.

Now that the General Education Program no longer needs to be held hostage in order to provide a (false) basis to argue for the establishment of a College of Arts and Sciences at SIUE, perhaps we can at long last do some of the things—like the many constructive suggestions listed in this report—that are needed to improve the ways in which general education is addressed at SIUE.

Above all, as this report notes in IV, "Someone should be put in charge of general education immediately." On behalf of an earlier General Education Committee, I wrote to and spoke with the Provost in almost identical language in 1988. Nothing happened.

In my own experience, a special area of concern is IS courses. To confuse an interdisciplinary course with one that is team-taught, to think that either of these will be guaranteed by a curricular proposal from two individuals in separate Schools, and to permit serial teaching under the rubric of team teaching are just three examples of substantive confusion at SIUE about the nature of IS courses (which may, I believe, be quite diverse among themselves).

But I would not wish my own specific concerns with IS courses to be permitted to take the place of the broader concerns addressed by this report.

We are told in this document that "The overriding message of this report is that general education has never been a high priority on this campus..." I believe that is not true for many individual faculty members who have dedicated substantial effort to general education at SIUE. And I believe the authors of this report would agree with me in this respect. But I agree with the report that general education has not been a high priority in the university as a whole, in its administration, and perhaps in the work of some faculty members.

Facile comments about SIUE's commitment to excellence in undergraduate education are put in a correct light by the contents of this report.

Cc: Ron Glossop
Carol Keene
Marsha Puro

MEMORANDUM

TO: Curt Smith

FROM: John Farley

DATE: June 14, 1994

SUBJECT: General Education Review

I would like to comment on the portion of the General Education Review addressing diversity issues and the IGR requirement. It appears that the loss of institutional memory noted in another part of the General Education Review is applicable here, because the discussion of the current IGR requirement begins with a factual error. The current IGR requirement was NOT imposed on the University by the state legislature, and in fact was the product of a long process involving a special ad-hoc committee, the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Council, and the Faculty Senate. It is true that a number of years ago (in 1989), the state legislature did pass a statewide requirement for something like an IGR course, which did not go into effect at the time because of a gubernatorial line item veto. It is also true that a less specific requirement that all universities require some education on diversity was passed in a subsequent legislative session, and is now in effect. However, our requirement was a product of our own internal process and was not a direct outcome of the law currently in effect.

When the first legislation was passed but vetoed, an ad-hoc committee was created to address the issue and consider whether some kind of course or other educational experience on diversity should be required at SIUE, regardless of what the legislature did or didn't do. I was chair of that committee, which was convened in the 1989-90 academic year. Other members of the committee were Depecia Bagchi, Ik Ju Kang, Steve Rigdon, Dave Valley, and Rudy Wilson. That committee recommended, in considerable detail, that all students should be required to take coursework or a workshop in intergroup relations. It specified the kinds of issues that should be included in courses approved as meeting the requirement, and it also stated strongly the need for such courses and workshops to be taught by faculty with specialized expertise in diversity issues. At the time of the committee's report, no action was taken by the Senate because the general feeling was that changes in requirements such as that should no be decided upon until the semester conversion issue was resolved. I attach a copy of the committee's report for your information.

In the meantime, the state passed a rather watered-down version of the earlier legislation which the governor signed. The interpretation then was that any course containing material on diversity could be used to meet the requirement, and a long laundry list of courses, many of which contained only a little material on diversity, was compiled. Any student who took any of these courses was deemed to have met the state requirement. At the same time, there was a widespread feeling among the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Council, and the Senate that we should do something more than that here at SIUE. By that time the decision to convert to semesters had been made, and there were

discussions about different ways to require coursework in international concerns and in domestic intergroup relations. The current policy was an outgrowth of those discussions; it specifies that in order to graduate, every student must take a course whose primary focus is on intergroup relations in the United States. The nature of the courses to be approved for meeting this requirement was not as clearly specified as it was under Option 1 of the earlier proposal, but it was stated that the course had to deal primarily with intergroup relations issues. This policy went into effect at least one year after SIUE was already in compliance with the state law, and reflects SIUE's own internal process, not an externally-imposed mandate.

With respect to the General Education Review's recommendations on the IGR course, I strongly suspect that they are correct in their observation that current treatment of diversity issues in IGR courses is uneven. I am not even sure that all current IGR courses primarily concern diversity, though some clearly do. However, I don't think we really know, because we haven't carefully looked at the courses to see if this is the case. We should. I continue to believe that it is very important that every student at SIUE get at least one course dealing mainly or entirely with diversity issues, and taught by someone with specialized academic expertise in diversity issues. It is absolutely true that considerable damage can be done by someone trying to teach such a course without the appropriate expertise. For this reason, I believe that every student needs to get a course focusing specifically on diversity and taught by someone with such expertise. We might also want to be more specific about the issues that should be addressed in such a course, and I think that the Option 1 recommendation of the ad-hoc committee (in the enclosed report) might be useful in that regard.

On the other hand, I also feel that we are doing a far less than adequate job of incorporating diversity into our general curriculum. People do not have to have specialized expertise (though they may well need some additional training or education) in order to make sure that all groups and viewpoints are fairly represented in their teaching. Thus, I strongly support the recommendation concerning the training program being offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence, and would be happy to help in any way that I can in the development of such a program. However, it must be clearly understood that this is not an either/or proposition: there is a need both for all students to take a specialized course in intergroup relations taught by someone with appropriate expertise and for diversity to be incorporated across the curriculum. Thank you for considering my views on this matter. I would appreciate your sharing this communication and the enclosure with the membership of the Curriculum Council.

Cc: Marsh Puro
Paul Pitts

Enclosure

To: Curt Smith, Chair Faculty Senate Curriculum Council
Box 1125

From: Steve Rigdon, Chair, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Subject: Report on General Education

Date: August 17, 1994

I have read the report on the General Education program review, and I find myself in agreement with most of it. I would like to proffer the following comments.

1. I agree that the “distribution” requirements are much too complicated. There must be a way to simplify them.
2. Is there a way to *encourage* the taking of a foreign language? As it is now, there is a penalty of 2 credit hours (50 vs. 48 hours to complete GE requirements) for those students who elect to take a foreign language.
3. Writing across the curriculum is important. We in the Math department have instituted a policy regarding the writing requirements in mathematics, statistics, and operations research courses.
4. For the same reasons stated in the report, I support the abolishment of the CS requirement in the skills part of the GE program. We must be cautious here, though. Replacing the computer course with a quantitative reasoning course would certainly increase our department’s service load. The GE report states (Sec. XI) that “This does not require much in the way of new resources because our research indicates that the overwhelming majority of our students already take at least one math course.” I looked through the undergraduate catalog and found that the following programs do not require a single college level mathematics or statistics course:

Bachelor of Liberal Studies (University College)

BA Art – Studio Art

BA Art – Art History

BS Art – Studio Art

BFA Art and Design

BS, BA Mass Communications – TV Radio

BS, BA Mass Communications – Journalism

BA Music

BA Music – Music History/ Literature

BA Music – Music Merchandising

BM – Performance

BM – Jazz Performance

BM – Theory/ Composition

BM – Musical Theatre

BS, BA – Speech Communication

BS, BA – Speech Pathology and Audiology

BS, BA - Theatre

BS, BA – Design/ Technical Theatre

BS, BA - Dance

BS, BA Theatre – Performance

BA English

BA Foreign Language and Literature

BA Philosophy

BA, BS Anthropology

BA, BS Geography

BA, BS History

BA, BS Political Science

BA, BS Sociology

BA, BS Sociology – Employment Relations

Students who choose the BS may now select Option A, which gives them the choice of CS 108, MIS 108, or STAT 107, so some undoubtedly take the STAT

107. Those students who pursue a BA, and most of the above programs are BAs, do not have to take either the computer course or the statistics course. I believe it is an overstatement to say that the “overwhelming majority of our students take at least one math course.”
5. I also agree that we should not accept students who have little or no chance of succeeding at SIUE. The undergraduate catalog states on p. 8 “Persons seeking admission to the University must meet the following standards:...[a list of the requirements follows]...Applicants (other than international students) who do not meet minimum high school course requirements but who otherwise meet the freshman criteria upon which admission is based will be admitted to the University as special admission students.” The “must” in the first sentence doesn’t really mean “must.” I’ve heard that more than half of the entering students are “special admission students.” It makes you wonder whether “special” is the right word here.
 6. The three-semester sequence in the natural sciences would throw a monkey wrench at transfer students. What would you do with a student that has come here having taken two science courses at another college? Our department does not have any laboratory courses in the true sense, but I will guess that space, equipment, and faculty will make a required lab course very difficult to implement.
 7. Can we have some departments develop IS courses that will meet the IGR requirement? It seems to me that an IGR course would almost have to be interdisciplinary.
 8. The speech requirement is supposed to give students some experience at speaking before a group. Does Speech 103 (Interpersonal Communication) achieve this?
 9. Finally, can we shorten the GE program? Please don’t think that I do not support the GE program and general education in general, but it may be possible to require fewer hours. There are many programs on campus that are nearly impossible to complete in four years, in part because more than 124 hours are required. If we encourage writing across the curriculum, and thinking across the curriculum, and quantitative reasoning across the curriculum, can’t we reduce the number of hours that students spend in actual GE courses? I found in my office undergraduate catalogs from three universities. In each case the number of hours required for general education was considerably less than our 48-50 hours.

Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY Foundation Curriculum 39 hours
Western Illinois University (1984-85) Univ Basic Curriculum 44 hours
University of Illinois (1981-93) 22-24 hours

August 26, 1994

To: Members of the Faculty Senate Curriculum Council

Fr: Greg Stephen, Chair, Computer Science Dept.
Robert Klepper, Chair, Management Information Systems Dept.

Re: Comments on the General Education Committee’s report

In its report of May 2, 1994, the General Education Committee made many recommendations. These comments regard recommendation X (ten) in which the General Education Committee report says:

The computer basic skills course should no longer be required. Computer skills are best learned in conjunction with some real tasks; they should be taught in the disciplines. If students enter the university with no word processing skills, this can be addressed in either English 101 (as it currently is for many students) or in a brief non-credit workshop.

The Center for Teaching Excellence should provide faculty with the opportunity to go to formal faculty development workshops in computer techniques and how to teach them.

The Centrality of Information Technology

Our basic objection to this recommendation concerns the centrality of computing technology to our society and the need of SIUE students for basic computer literacy.

The media bombards us with so much information on the future promise of this technology:

- The internet
- Multimedia
- The information super highway
- Interactive TV
- Handheld data-voice send and receive technology
- Electronic documents replacing paper in the office place

that we tend to lose sight of the immense impact this technology has already had on our society:

- computer skills as necessary for many entry-level jobs

- differential access to computer technology as yet another determinant of socio-economic differences.

It is abundantly clear that students now graduating from SIUE must have a measure of computer literacy to succeed in an increasingly information technology and knowledge based economy. In the future they will need more, not less, computer knowledge.

Problems with the General Education Committee's Proposal

There are a number of substantial drawbacks to the General Education Committee's proposal, and until each of these is addressed in some satisfactory way the Curriculum Council should not proceed with the Committee's recommendation.

1. Some students will get too few computing skills under this proposal. Most disciplines already have a difficult time teaching all the skills they feel their graduates need. In practice they will teach the computing skills directly relevant to the discipline. Under the Committee's proposal gaps in skills will occur. For example, the business student who has a good command of word processing and spreadsheets applies for a first job that requires extensive use of the Internet but has never had exposure to use of online services.

There are other dimensions to this problem as well, e.g. students who switch majors and/or students who go out in the world of work and take jobs that are completely outside their SIUE majors.

2. Some students will get redundant instruction. This problem will certainly arise across the University and can even arise inside a school when required courses in two departments demand the same computer skills but the courses can be taken in any order. To reduce redundancy many schools will find it necessary to schedule and staff computer skill courses.

3. The Committee's proposal will result in added advising work and responsibility for remedial instruction for each discipline.

Students who enter SIUE have very uneven backgrounds in computing. Some come with very good computing skills. Others have none. We find that about 50% of freshmen students taking the 108 courses have had no real prior computing experience.

One of the great advantages of courses like MIS 108 and CS 108 is that they impart basic computer literacy (not just in word processing but in operating systems, spreadsheets, database, online search and basic computer dial-in use). Under the Committee's proposal each discipline will have to shoulder some of the responsibility of dealing with the uneven skill levels of students (Who has necessary skills? Who doesn't? What indicators do we use? How do we make up deficiencies?)

4. Computer technology changes very rapidly. Under the Committee's proposal the faculty development process as regards computer skills must be continuous and ongoing if students are to be given skills with currency in the marketplace. Faculty have this obligation in any case, but with the Committee's proposal there is less room to hide. Schools and departments will have to set standards and police faculty skills more rigorously.

Our Perspective on CS and MIS 108

Together Computer Science and the MIS Department teach about 20 sections of 108 per semester. Most sections are taught by instructors and call staff. However, both departments devote considerable time on the part of full time, continuing faculty to planning 108 and keeping the content current. And we work with Academic Computing in an effort to keep lab equipment and software up to date.

We design and teach 108 to meet a goal of giving all students a common understanding of computer concepts and a common level of computer skills. Our outlook is broad, not discipline specific, and it is oriented to the skills students will need to survive in the future.

108 is a hands-on, not a theory course. Students spend most class hours at a keyboard learning software and concepts by doing real tasks. These are not discipline-specific tasks, but the skills can be transferred with little difficulty. We see 108 as providing the basic skills that are reinforced and augmented when it comes time to use computers in discipline specific courses. We also see 108 as imparting necessary skills that may not be revisited in discipline specific courses.

We have a commitment to keeping introductory computer literacy instruction current. We are moving 108 to Windows software as the hardware and software in the computer labs on campus allow us to do so. We are also looking forward to incorporating Internet access and multimedia in this course in the future.

We urge the Curriculum Council to consider the issue of computer basic skills carefully before acting on the General Education Committee's recommendation.

August 31, 1994

To: Curtis Smith, Curriculum Council

From: Betty Richardson, English

Subject: Response to GE report and memo of May 2, 1994

I'm sorry this is so late. I wasn't going to respond. Two days ago I was approached directly and firmly by a colleague in English. I am responding.

1. **Focus of GE report:** The main problem is that the report, in a Don Quixote kind of way, get on its horse and rides off in all directions. What is needed is a clear-cut set of goals with itemized priorities, one for each of the next few years. You need to pump all available money into achieving one year's goals before moving on to the next. Otherwise, this report is just one more of so many I have read over the years, full of sound and fury, pomp and circumstance, signifying what exactly?
2. **Rewards:** This institution pays lip service to teaching. In reality, the person who serves on enough committees, runs around the conference circuit enough, and publishes enough is rewarded with tenure, promotion, and whatever pitiful salary raises we can muster. If the person is primarily committed to teaching, he or she will be patronized by the conference-goers, openly ridiculed by colleagues and some administrators, and perhaps, if all goes well, will receive a token check and plaque some commencement. The situation, at least in my school, is better now than in 1991 when I received the university Teaching Excellence Award. That year, since I did not have much coming into print and was doing only average committee service, (whatever that is), I was told I could not receive the highest (#5) merit on teaching alone, although I could on scholarship alone and, of all things, on service alone. I wonder how many units still have similar situations; fixing something on paper, as your report suggests, does not mean it is fixed in fact. Your report vaguely suggests that the Provost should do something about this. This is not an area in which vagueness is in order.

May I suggest you examine the system-wide award given annually by the Governor's State system and the distinguished professor programs of other state institutions. The Governor's State program is remarkable. Each institution within the system nominates one candidate for the final award. That candidate receives a substantial award even if he loses the system-wide honor. The system-wide winner is honored not only with a check but with released time for a project of the person's choice and with an increase in base pay, as well as the opportunity to guest lecture. Judges for this, for obvious reasons, are chosen from outside the

system; I have been a judge for the past two years and am much impressed with how seriously teaching is taken in the evaluation of the candidates. Granted, not every professor wins or is even a school candidate, but he or she, at least, has some notion that a reward for excellence is possible.

Here we have nothing. Rather than use rewards, we punish, if being low on the merit scale for our pathetic raises is punishment; we belong firmly to the castor oil school of education (if it isn't horrible, it's not good for you). I have worked in some odd places in my time, but never have I worked in an atmosphere this negative. A Teacher Center might circulate some practical gimmicks, but it will not solve the long range problem, which is to encourage good instructors to remain good instructors, a matter that does require effort, year in and year out. The GE report suggests we must teach people to teach well; well, perhaps so, but try giving them some reason to keep teaching well first, and then worry about the people left over. Some kind of rewards system that focuses firmly on instruction is crucial here.

3. **Time management:** One problem on this campus is the notion, especially dear to administrators, that faculty, unlike others, have a 48-hour day to work in. We are bombarded with notices of forums, programs, exercise sessions, speakers, meetings, presentations, plays, speeches, graffiti, meditations, gymnastics, underwater volleyball meets, committees, student functions, other committees and sons of committees, all of which faculty, it is assumed, have plenty of time to attend. Your Teacher Center will merely add to that burden and, in fact, further reduce the time instructors spend with students and their writing. I suggest forgetting the center and using available funds to help instructors increase their time with students.

First, let us understand each other. Teaching writing-intensive courses is a 40-hour a week job, at least. All my classes are writing intensive. I shall describe what I do, not because I am some kind of model or superior person (this campus teems with self-proclaimed superior people and I refuse to join them), but to help you understand what real writing-intensive classes do. I am, simply, better than the average bear at getting students to care about their writing.

In my classes, students are allowed to revise their papers until they get the grades they want. (This, of course, drives those worried about grade inflation quite mad, but that's their problem.) Students learn from revision. If an instructor puts a grade on a paper and leaves it outside her door at the end of the term, the student learns nothing, especially since the student probably won't pick up the paper. If he does, he'll look only at the grade. If the instructor fixes the paper on disc, the instructor has proven that the instructor knows how to fix a paper on disc, and the student learns nothing unless there's some reason to review and rewrite. If, on the other hand, the students is motivated to work on her writing, she will, with remarkably few exceptions, work on her writing. I've had the occasional student from a really wretched educational institution revise up to ten times to move a paper upward on the grade scale.

Now, this takes time. I regularly teach three classes, usually English 111, an advanced GE class, and Advanced Composition (English 490). After the English 111 students who don't want to write papers transfer to the sections in which they don't have to, I usually have about thirty students. In English 111, students write

three papers each. In my upper level GE courses, students either write one long research paper or a short research paper and a critical paper or, if appropriate to the course, an original piece of fiction. After the first day when I go through my syllabus, there are usually about 25 to 30 students left in those classes. My Advanced Composition class averages 20 students, each with eight or nine assignments. Now, please multiply the number of assignments by the number of students. Then multiply that number by the number of possible revisions. No, it isn't really that bad. A few students happily accept their Ds or Es or turn in the papers so late that revision is impossible. (I have no deadlines: these people have to grow up and take responsibility for their lives sometime, and they might as well start in my classes, and it is the absence of deadlines that makes the repeated revisions possible, which I will explain if anyone's curious.) On an average, students turn in two or three drafts, including the first one. Nonetheless, this is work. Now, tell me that I also have time to attend workshops, forums, seminars, sensitivity sessions, programs, etc., while publishing (which I do), serving on committees (which, alas, I do), and having a life (which I sometimes don't). With course preparation and keeping up on relevant literature and preparing and grading exams, you are talking a 40-hour workweek even without those responsibilities.

Need a student revise this much, you ask. Actually, the effect usually is the same as if I allowed them only two revisions; in most cases, all the unlimited revision possibility offers is hope and a positive learning environment, which young people (and old people) need. It eliminates the negative attitude that invades too much of their lives, too. And two revisions, I think, are the absolute minimum for writing-intensive courses.

What about just having them write without reading the writing? I know, I know. Certain theorists say that student writing need not be read. Students, they say, benefit from just writing. To me, this is rather like encouraging them to go off and practice their drunk driving. If they are doing something goofy, telling them to do more of it accomplishes nothing much worth thinking about. Students complain about too little feedback, not too much, and, in my experience, most students have a pretty intelligent sense of what they need. Moreover, I have heard certain such theorists, here and elsewhere, go absolutely ballistic when an article is returned without response by an editor or when tenure and promotion, salary, or research committees make decisions and do not provide feedback. The absence of appropriate feedback is, in fact, often reason for formal grievance. Hey, you can't have it both ways, guys. Either humans need appropriate feedback, or they don't. Students, after all, are humans, and they need, on a different level of sophistication, precisely the responses that faculty need. Why should they not?

OK, forget about the shortcuts. They sound great in theory. So much does. In practice...well, that's another matter.

Now, let us turn back to what would help in teaching writing-intensive classes. Is it a Teacher Center? Well, no. That would merely take more time from the doing of it, as I said, and would offer administrators one more excuse to penalize faculty who are actually teaching writing-intensive classes instead of attending meetings, etc.

One thing that would help would be limiting enrollment in writing-intensive classes. Your report mentions this. I need not say more.

I've mentioned a reward system. Let me mention rewards again: Rewards, REWARDS, **REWARDS!!!**

Another measure would be help in streamlining the many departmental and school functions that could easily be farmed out to intelligent staff workers, as business and education in some cases do. Let us take, as a horrible example, decentralized advising in English. Many people in English do not have access to SIS except in the English office, which often is closed and which certainly is not available on weekends and at night. Those of us in that position spend much time spinning wheels, especially since we mostly do not have voice mail, and we waste much time playing telephone tag with students trying to get advised. This is especially frustrating to students who want the B.A. degree but who also seek teacher certification. These must see two advisers in English and a third in education. Now, I realize that faculty advising was supposed to improve bonding with students, but our Experts (really, do we need to bring in any more such Experts?) forget that homicidally furious people do not bond meaningfully, except, perhaps, in mutual hatred of the system that frustrates them. In addition to this problem, we have clerical duties. I, for example, become downright hostile when asked to spend time in basically clerical chores, as, for example, inventorying all English texts coming out of adoption, which is among my current assignments. Because no other department has the kinds of problems we have (freshmen English, other writing courses, GE courses, large number of majors [the reassignment of English/Ed majors to English should clarify on paper the numbers we have been teaching all along]); we have had little support in obtaining additional staff assistance. What we need is a kind of task force that would come in and reach its own conclusions and make recommendations for restructuring as we move into the new college. They would bring a fresh eye; they might see things we do not, and their recommendations might be effective in helping us get some time free for instruction. (Of course, such an advisory group would be effective only if it were combined with a rewards structure to ensure that, given more time, faculty would actually use this time for writing- and thinking-intensive courses.) Naturally, in some departments, faculty would consider this analysis to be an invasion of their rights. OK, they don't have to play the game. (It's possible that English wouldn't, but it's worth trying.) If they don't play, they would not be eligible for the unit rewards offered. In short, we really must cut through this myth that faculty are lazy louts and loutesses, teeming with time.

It isn't, for most people, true. We need to free up faculty time, not use it up.

4. **Admission standards:** Ah, guys, now really! Yes, we are enrolling human beings in bulk, like a kind of academic Sam's, and many have no chance of success, and we should do something about this; it is enormously unfair to the students. But you're missing a basic problem. Check with Isaiah Smithson for the exact figures, but, I believe, the last survey shows that most of our students do not take 101 and 102 on this campus. Many are transferring in from community colleges, some good, some awful. I have, in fact, known instances on this campus in which advisers sent students who could not pass our 101 and 102 to certain select community colleges where they could be certain of As or Bs. With articulation

agreements and the rest, we are increasingly admitting students whose writing skills are evaluated nowhere. The faculty, of course, looking for an easy way to avoid thinking about this, beats up on the English Department, which, in fact, has not taught most of these students. Instead of a Rising Junior Requirement, what we need is a Before You Declare Your Major You Must Write an In-Class Essay Under Controlled Conditions and It Had Better Be Good Requirement, or what you say about admissions is just a bunch of words. Such an essay, written before declaration, could be screened by a faculty committee of the department into which the student seeks admission. Should it be judged incompetent, the student could be required to take another writing course. Of course, that leads to staffing questions and the questions of freeing up faculty time to teach well, and that leads to me in a circle, so I'll quit now.

8/29/94

TO: Curt Smith, Chair, Faculty Senate Curriculum Council

FROM: Linda Funkhouser, Director of Undergraduate Studies
English Department

SUBJECT: Response to Report on General Education, May 2, 1994

I particularly agree with the following sections of the report:

IV (Put someone in charge)

V (Limit class size in 111 and IS.) I would recommend 24-26, not 30.

XIII (Limit admission.) Use money not spent on a "Center" as buffer against loss of state money because of lower #s.

Faculty Development and Rewards, p. 7

"examine our standards," p. 9

I also agree with the following sections:

VI (Funds for IS)

VIII (Integrate)

IX (Science & Math)

X (Computer)

XI (Quantitative)

XII (IGR)

I DO NOT AGREE THAT A "CENTER" IS WORTHWHILE.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A WAY FOR SOME FOLKS TO PUT MONEY IN THEIR PURSES, GET RELEASED TIME, AND AVOID TEACHING, RATHER THAN A WAY TO IMPROVE ANYONE'S TEACHING. POINTS V & XIII ARE A BETTER WAY TO INCREASE THE LIKLIHOOD OF STUDENTS LEARNING.

FULL-TIME, COMMITTED FACULTY ARE AN EXPENSE WORTH THE MONEY.
Tenure and promotion based on teaching may be a dream; a full-time job should not have to be a dream for our M.A. professionals.

Suggestion:

As a way of experimenting with writing across the curriculum that would put money in the pockets of graduate students and not take full-time professors out of the classroom to teach other full-time professors, **I suggest second year GA's from the Literature and the Teaching of Writing M.A. Specializations in English be hired by the general university budget to assist in writing intensive courses outside the School of Humanities.** They should be assigned to faculty willing to work with a Lit/TW GA in teaching and grading/conferring with students on writing done about course-related content.

Cc: Dean David Butler, School of Humanities
Prof. Robert Ziegler, Acting Chair, Dept. of English

8/29/94

TO: Curt Smith, Chairperson
Faculty Senate Curriculum Council
Box 1125

FROM: Fred W. Robbins
Assoc. Prof., English

SUBJ: Response to Review of General Education Program

This review tells some hard truths, and no doubt few administrators of the usual ilk will even be willing to try to believe them. Of course teaching is not really valued. The entire profession even perversely recognizes that fact, and doubts that anything will ever be done, because of the economics of higher education. Creating a "Center" for teaching excellence is only a bandaid, an opportunity for someone to establish a little grant-driven empire. Instead, whatever money can be earmarked ought to be given as bonus money or salary increments to really good teachers who know what they are doing and do it well, and to those who improve markedly. I think a planning committee of all those who have won teaching excellence awards ought to be constituted and given released time in order to make a real try at instituting a Boyer-like system to recognize and reward teaching excellence.

Raising the entrance standards is long overdue; if it can't be done now, at least we should stop making so many exceptions and giving so many waivers and "special admits." We are letting people in who have no chance to graduate. If we lose income because of decreased enrollment, then we ought to use the money saved by not instituting a "Center" for teaching excellence in order to make up the loss.

We ought to try the writing across the curriculum approach—everybody else seems to be trying it or planning on it. What we will inevitably discover is that we have a large number of remedial students here, and their presence in regular classes is a huge teaching challenge, even to those of us whose profession involves teaching writing. That will probably doom writing across the curriculum, unless we also strengthen remedial education.

Skills courses usually uncover the unprepared student's failings; until the AD program certifies a student's preparation, the student should simply not be able to attempt a regular GE course, skills or otherwise. The issues of General Education standards, admission standards and the remedial program are inextricably intertwined. We must either commit to supporting AD courses and fund their teaching, or we must change the nature of the student body radically by raising the admissions standards so that we are all

teaching students who have had all the state's required high school courses, have all graduated in something more than just the upper half of their classes, and have more than just a pitiful 17 ACT score. To continue to try to have it both ways with admissions is cynical and manipulative. I would argue for enhancement of the AD program, and for giving it enforcement power. Such a move would be enormously unpopular with many students, but it would be the best thing this faculty could do for them, for reasonable standards, and for the institution itself. If we see General Education as distinct from remedial education, we are being excessively optimistic. Better to face the issue squarely, if we are ever allowed to face the real issues at all.

One problem which I cannot find addressed in the report is the over-reliance on part-time instructors. How can we build a strong program when so many GE instructors are "call staff," people with low pay and no benefits? If we really want to reward good teaching, we ought to hire the best of these as full-time faculty.

I appreciate the thoughtful and incisive report of the General Education Committee, and I hope earnestly that someone in the Rendleman Building will listen this time. The report itself makes it very clear that no one in that region has listened up to now. Since about 1969, I have been waiting for a committee to speak its piece as straightforwardly as this one, and now I just hope the message is not filed in the round file again, as so many have been. A university which values teaching and rewards it seems utopian. If we could approach this ideal here, I might consider delaying my planned early retirement. That's what it would take to dispel my enervation.

Sept 1, 1994

TO: Curt Smith, Curriculum Council

FROM: George Henderson, Physics

RE: Report of the General Education Committee

As one interested and involved in the development and teaching of physics general education courses and a participant in campus discussions of this important topic over many years, I would like to offer some comments on this most recent comprehensive consideration of the matter. Though many significant issues of a more general nature are raised by the report, which is quite good overall, I will restrict my comments to the recommendations concerning science courses.

First, the General Education Committee deserves credit for stimulating a rich discussion in our School Curriculum Committee concerning the 111 science courses. That discussion, which is continuing, has been healthy and substantive and has been shaped by conversations with Professor Puro as her committee's deliberations progressed.

Second, the report's strong emphasis on the importance of laboratory experience in the introductory science courses is absolutely correct. However, as the Physics Department has learned from the experience of offering two different introductory courses with laboratory (GSM 102 about 20 years ago and Physics 130 more recently), if there is a choice, students will enroll in a course without a laboratory. Both courses eventually suffered from low enrollment and ceased to be offered. A great deal of effort is required to redesign such a course properly. We did so twice: students in those two courses were very pleased with their experience, BUT without being directed into the courses, students

went elsewhere since they were given the choice. Since the General Education Committee report does not seem to recommend that requirements be changed to require all students to take the envisioned introductory sequence, it would appear we might be about to make the same mistake. Optimum instruction demands laboratory experience, but students will not get it if it is not required.

Third, while the overall tenor of the report is constructive, there are some statements and undercurrents that mystify me because they do not seem to be based on the facts as I see them. Foremost among these is the implication that the “needs of the generalist” are not being met. Please note that the departments of Biology, Chemistry and Physics offer 111 courses specifically designed for the general students and **not** for the specialist. An examination of the catalog descriptions or a visit to a 111 classroom will convince anyone that these are courses taken quite seriously [it is very difficult to teach a good science course for non-scientists, and we have been doing it for years] but not intended for future biologists, chemists or physicists. In addition, I do not see that “rules have been bent for science to make the courses fit and intellectual purposes have not been met” regarding introductory and advanced course designations. Finally, I strongly disagree with the assertion that our 111 courses are “firmly rooted in the past” and “our students are not being well served” by them because they are not “cross-disciplinary”. If the disciplinary distinctions in method and approach are not important for the sciences, are they more so for other disciplines? Why not “a three semester sequence of [social] science courses for the non-specialist”, encompassing, say, the disciplines of history, sociology and anthropology, “emphasizing the nature of [social] scientific inquiry and the applications of [social] science to modern life”, which “should emphasize the connections among the” disciplines “instead of being the isolated introductions to the disciplines that now exist”?

I hope you will consider these points as you proceed with your deliberations on this matter.

Cc: Physics Faculty
Marsha Puro

Date: August 31, 1994

To: Curt Smith, Chair
Faculty Senate Curriculum Council

From: Brian Abel Ragen & Sheryl L. Meyering

Re: Review of the General Education Program

The recent report of the General Education Committee contains a great deal of sound analysis of the university’s problems. Especially in its discussion of raising admission standards and limiting class size in 111 courses, it seems right on the money. We think, however, that the report also makes several misguided suggestions.

We are troubled, most of all, by the report’s recurrent emphasis on methods. In both the discussion of faculty development and in the proposal for a Center for Teaching Excellence, the emphasis is not on the knowledge professors have acquired and which

they can pass on to their students; it is on the development of teaching skills. To see how misguided this emphasis is we need only look at American education below the college level. For the last forty years, teachers have increasingly been trained, not in any rigorous field of knowledge, but in the sort of vague "teaching methods" the committee wants us to begin devoting time and money to. The results, as the other parts of the committee's report acknowledge, have been disastrous. If we shift our focus from knowledge of the subject to methods of teaching, we will simply replicate the disaster.

The worst suggestion in the report is that a "Center for Teaching Excellence" be created. Let us be very clear about what that would be: a bureaucracy whose purpose is to pay professors not to teach undergraduates. The university already supports enough programs that allow faculty members to avoid teaching basic courses, or to acquire summer pay, or both, by proclaiming their devotion to teaching.

The Center for Teaching Excellence would be an appalling misapplication of funds. A university that refuses to hire enough faculty to staff its writing courses would pay full-time faculty to sit around in seminars and talk about methods. A university that does not buy enough books for its library would pay someone to administer seminars in pedagogy.

Similarly troubling is the idea that the university needs a formal writing-across-the-curriculum program. It does not. The university needs all professors in all fields to assign papers in every class and to comment on every paper they assign. There is no special art to this task. The quality of writing has only gone downhill since we started pretending that there is. Professors claim that teachers must be trained in the teaching of writing for only two reasons: Either they are "composition specialists" who can get out of teaching 101 by teaching other teachers, or they are professors in other fields who can get out of assigning papers by saying, "I just don't have the training." A professor who can't tell good writing from bad-- who is, in other words, incompetent to evaluate written documents-- has no business teaching in any field. (And shall we stop figuring our grades until we take the appropriate seminars--fully paid, of course-- in statistics and assessment?) Let every department decree a minimum number of papers per course, and let chairs make sure--during annual faculty conferences-- that the papers have been read and commented on.

We will not foster good teaching by allowing professors to skip out of their 100-level assignments to schmooze with other people who are also skipping out of their basic classes. If the university wants to improve general education, it should do the following:

- 1) Hire more full-time teachers to do the job—and teachers who are trained in their fields, not in pedagogy or comp. theory.
- 2) Admit only students who are capable of benefiting from and contributing to a real intellectual discussion. Letting in some of the students we do hurts not just them, since they waste time pursuing a degree they have no hope of completing, but the other students as well, since those students are denied the community of serious students that it is the first business of a college to create.
- 3) Put money into real intellectual resources—books for the library, research in new areas for the faculty—not into teaching methods.
- 4) Show that we have genuine standards by instituting real impartial tests for graduation. Currently we have assessment tools that only waste time—the RJP is a test students can't flunk; aside from its paid graders, no one benefits from it. But if departments instituted flunkable exit exams, such as a set score on the URE or a

GRE area exam, we would have a standard by which we could judge both our students' performance and our own.

Cc: Bob Ziegler
Members of the English Executive Committee
Marsha Puro

September 2, 1994

To: The General Education Committee
From: Judith Cingolani, Director, Social Work Program

The most problematic shortcoming of the General Education program for my teaching is that students entering the social work program, even very strong students, seldom are able to use conceptual frameworks or theories systematically to analyze case material. They learn the concepts but they do not understand the process of analysis itself, or the differences between description, analysis and critical analysis even though the analytic process is common to almost every discipline. This makes it difficult for them to use the theories they learn to interpret, understand and evaluate data.

It is through the process of analysis that the gap between the abstract and the concrete is bridged. Unless students learn how to do this, theories and concepts are only for entertainment, since they cannot be used to interpret and understand observed reality such as a novel, a painting or the behavior of a ten-year-old.

Last year, after all but two students in my class failed an "analysis" question on the midterm examination, I discussed this issue with them. They had difficulty articulating even a generic definition of analysis. I had assumed that this was covered, at least briefly, in the skills requirement for a critical thinking course. I learned that this course covers only classical logic, and that none of the students in the course could explain how this material related to anything. This is not surprising. Logic is itself a conceptual framework. Unless the process of analysis through which it is used is learned, logic, like any other framework or theory, cannot be applied.

We require social work majors to take a course in literature. It was our hope that this would provide students with experience in content analysis. They do not know what content analysis is.

Now I am taking time out of a very "content-loaded" course to teach students about the process of analysis in a very generic sense. I believe it is reasonable to review this material but not to have to teach it from scratch. I don't have time to really do justice to this skill. Even so, most students get at least a basic understanding. It is not difficult material to teach. It just takes time and practice for students to become confident and proficient.

I believe this should be an important part of the skills requirement for General Education, and that students should go over examples of analysis from a variety of disciplines. At present, our best students learn this process inductively but never get the intellectual tools

or the vocabulary to think about and understand it. They literally don't know what they're doing.