Memorandum

March 9, 2011

TO: Richard Englert, Provost & Senior VP for Academic Affairs
    Peter Jones, Senior Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs

FROM: Istvan Varkonyi, Director
      General Education Program


Launched in 2008 with a great deal of support for its development and implementation, General Education marked a momentous occasion for the university community, including the undergraduate students, faculty, and administration.

Now, we need your support and assistance as we move into the next phase of the curriculum. We must prepare for programmatic review and the recertification of previously approved courses as outlined in the GenEd policy (02.10.02). More importantly, we owe it to our students to guarantee the most robust learning environment possible.

The heart of the matter may be distilled into two questions:

- How has the course maintained fidelity to the approved proposal as it has developed and changed over time?
- How does the course continue to address the GenEd learning goals?

These questions are straightforward and easy to address, and they should be. If General Education course offerings were limited to a single department with a single instructor, our task would be simple. We could deal directly and solely with the instructors. However, many of our courses have been taught by multiple instructors of all ranks in multiple departments, and in some cases in different colleges. Thus, our task becomes more complex but all the more important.
Last fall, in emails to the community we asked faculty to share their thoughts on recertification and what evidence would be useful in responding to these questions. The responses were varied, rich, and incredibly consistent. Faculty from across the university, members of the GenEd Executive Committee (GEEC) and the GenEd Area Coordinators (GAC) agreed on a set of key documents that will enable us to review the courses and answer these questions. Those documents include:

- Syllabi
- Student work at varying levels (good, average and below average)
- Assignment Sheets (if details are not provided in the syllabus) and
- Narrative Statement

Faculty requested the recertification process not be onerous, and we believe a collection of these documents respects this request and also balances our need to maintain consistency. Aside from the narrative statement, these documents represent the byproduct of any given semester. We simply ask that instructors, departments, and colleges begin to assemble portfolios for each of its courses. GenEd Area Coordinators will assist with coordinating and building portfolios.

In September 2011, we will contact teams responsible for courses piloted in AY2007-2008 and request their assistance in testing the course recertification process. This trial run of course recertification will allow us to amend our processes and procedures before we begin the formal evaluation. In addition to testing the course recertification process, we will also host a series of informational meetings throughout the semester to explain the what, how, and why of course recertification for members of the University community.

In mid-April 2012, we will then distribute a calendar of courses slated for formal review in AY2012-2013. The schedule should allow ample time to gather the portfolio materials, particularly student work which the General Education Executive Committee requests be provided for the two most recent semesters.

**Portfolio Contents**

**I. Narrative**

The portfolio should include one narrative statement. The narrative statement should address four major components:

- changes in the course over time,
- similarities and dis-similarities across multiple section courses,
- strategies for alignment between multiple course sections and/or the proposal, and
- ways in which the course continues to develop GenEd learning goals.

**Note:** Evidence illustrating the claims in each of the sections should be provided,

Ideally, the narrative statement will be collaboratively developed and submitted. We have found discussions with colleagues to be the most effective at identifying key themes and encouraging innovation within GenEd, and we hope faculty involved will take advantage of the recertification process to review the original course proposal and speak with peers teaching the same course.
II. Syllabi, Assignment Sheets, and Student Work

Because we are evaluating course and not individual faculty, the portfolios should include individual folders for each department involved in teaching the course. A course portfolio may contain a number of folders, depending on the total number of departments who have participated in its instruction.

Each folder should include the following:

- syllabi,
- assignment sheets, and
- sample student work at varying levels (good, average, and below average)

Our goal is to receive input from at least 65% of faculty actively teaching the course. For clarification, we define anyone identified as instructor of record during a review year to be actively teaching the course as well as any full-time faculty identified as instructor of record in the year preceding its review.

III. Evaluation Criteria

Course portfolios will be examined for

- evidence that General Education learning goals are being met,
- faithfulness to the original course proposal, and
- consistency across multi-section courses and alignment strategies when warranted.

We anticipate the course materials will demonstrate General Education courses continue to develop key learning goals and provide direct evidence of student learning and development. In the absence of documentation, we cannot make such an assessment and will be forced to conclude the course does not meet the program’s objectives and should be removed from the inventory.

Again, we request your assistance and support as we engage in the next phase of development. We want to emphasize the importance of submitting the requested materials and of teamwork. Only through a collaborative and supportive process can we ensure the continued success of General Education.