



## **DRAFT PROPOSAL—FOR DISCUSSION**

**TO:** GVSU Faculty, Staff, Students

**FROM:** General Education Committee

Deb Bambini (KCON); Jim Bell, Jason Crouthamel, Phyllis Curtiss, Chris Dobson, Gamal Gasim, Roger Gilles (chair), Penney Nichols-Whitehead, Keith Rhodes, David Vessey (CLAS); Susan Carson (COE); Zach Conley (Student Senate); Emily Frigo (Library); Paul Sicilian (SCB); Ruth Stevens (CCPS); Guenter Tusch (PCEC); Michael Wambach (CHP); and Judy Whipp (BCOIS)

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**SUBJECT:** Revising General Education

Since Fall 2008, the General Education Committee (GEC) has been working on ways to align GE program goals with the ongoing national conversation on liberal education and to address widely-held concerns about the upper-level component (Themes) of the current GE program. Our discussions have taken into account what we have learned from the first program-wide GE assessment, which began in Fall 2007. As the result of our research, our assessment process, and our discussions, we have developed this two-part draft proposal for your input.

We invite you to read and consider this draft proposal, review the supporting documents available at the GE website ([www.gvsu.edu/gened](http://www.gvsu.edu/gened)), talk with your colleagues and with us over the next two months, and help us craft a final proposal that we can submit to faculty governance, if all goes well, by the end of this semester.

In brief, we propose two broad changes to the GE program:

1. Add three new GE goals—teamwork, problem-solving, and civic responsibility—and change our assessment plan to reduce the number of goals each GE course is responsible for teaching and assessing.
2. Eliminate the 22 Themes categories, create an upper-level requirement featuring problem-solving courses focused on global issues, and reduce the requirement from three courses to two.

Below, we describe each change in some detail, present a brief rationale for each change, and outline a possible implementation plan. While we have worked to present a coherent and workable proposal, we recognize that we need your input in order to finalize the details. Please consider this a living document. We have posted this draft, along with supporting documents, including an FAQ based on the conversations we have already had around campus, and we will update the draft as the discussion evolves. We have already scheduled unit- and college-level discussions, as well as four university-wide forums (see the GE website for dates and times). If you would like to schedule a discussion with GEC members, please e-mail us at [gened@gvsu.edu](mailto:gened@gvsu.edu). If you have comments or ideas, please post them at the GE website. We look forward to hearing from you.

## 1. Proposal to Revise the GE Goals and Assessment Plan

The current GE program has three knowledge goals. The first two—“the major areas of human investigation and accomplishment,” and “an understanding of one’s own culture and the cultures of others”—are expressed as content goals within the Foundations and Cultures categories, respectively. The third knowledge goal—“the tradition of humane inquiry” is not currently expressed in the content goals in any required GE category and is, therefore, not demonstrably active in the program. One aspect of this proposal is to “activate” this goal by making it a skills goal and creating an assessment plan for it.

The current GE program has four skills goals:

1. engage in articulate expression through effective writing and speaking
2. think critically and creatively
3. locate, evaluate, and use information effectively
4. integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives

We propose to split the “articulate expression” goal into separate “writing” and “speaking” goals, to convert the inactive “tradition of humane inquiry” knowledge goal into a skills goal called “ethical reasoning,” and revise the language of the “integration” goal.

We also propose to add three new skills goals, which would give us a total of nine (a fuller description of each goal is available at the GE website):

*Existing Goals:*

1. engage in articulate expression through effective writing
2. engage in articulate expression through effective speaking
3. think critically and creatively
4. locate, evaluate, and use information effectively
5. integrate and apply different areas of knowledge and multiple perspectives to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus
6. engage in ethical reasoning

*New Goals:*

7. work collaboratively in teams
8. solve problems by designing, evaluating, and implementing a strategy to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal
9. develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes for civic responsibility

As described above, the first six of these are already part of the current program. To accommodate the addition of the three new goals, we propose revising our assessment plan so that each GE skills goal is distributed a limited number of times in the GE program, allowing for more focused and rigorous teaching and assessment while ensuring that students gain sufficient exposure to each goal. The result of this new distribution of goals will be that GE Foundations and Cultures courses will be responsible for two goals each, instead of three.

In Fall 2010, we surveyed all units offering GE courses and asked them to identify the goals that are most natural for each of their GE courses. Based on that survey (the results of which are available at

the GE website), and based on our own experiences with the courses in each category, we have developed this preliminary distribution plan:

| GE Category:         | F/W | F/LS | F/PS | F/MS | F/A | F/HP | F/PL | F/SBS | C/US | C/WP | UD | TOT |   |
|----------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|------|-------|------|------|----|-----|---|
| Writing              | 1   |      | 1    |      |     | 1    | 1    |       |      |      |    | 4   |   |
| Speaking             |     |      |      |      |     |      |      |       | 1    | 1    |    | 2   |   |
| Crit/Crea. Thinking  | 1   |      |      | 1    |     | 1    |      |       |      | 1    |    | 4   |   |
| Info Literacy        | 1   | 1    |      |      |     |      |      | 1     | 1    |      |    | 4   |   |
| Integration          |     |      |      |      |     |      |      |       |      |      | 1  | 1   | 2 |
| Ethical Reasoning    |     | 1    |      |      |     |      | 1    |       |      |      |    |     | 2 |
| Teamwork             |     |      | 1    |      |     |      |      |       | 1    |      | 1  | 1   | 4 |
| Problem Solving      |     |      |      | 1    | 1   |      |      |       |      |      | 1  | 1   | 4 |
| Civic Responsibility |     |      |      |      | 1   |      |      | 1     | 1    |      |    |     | 3 |
| Total per Category:  | 3   | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2   | 2    | 2    | 2     | 2    | 2    | 3  |     |   |

*Note: F/W refers to "Foundations: Writing," F/LS refers to "Foundations: Life Sciences," etc. UD refers to "Upper Division" Please also note that GEC proposed the "Foundations: Writing" category as part of its proposal to revise Basic Skills. See the GE website or the Faculty Governance website for copies of that proposal.*

The "total per category" row at the bottom indicates the number of GE skills goals that courses in each GE category would be responsible for explicitly teaching and directly assessing. (We of course recognize that most or all GE courses touch on all of these goals. What we have here is a plan for ensuring the explicit teaching and direct assessment of each goal.) All current Foundations and Cultures categories would be responsible for two goals, down from three. All upper-division GE courses (the current Themes) would be responsible for three skills goals, down from five. And the new Foundations category, Writing, would be responsible for three skills goals. Of course, all GE courses would continue to be responsible for the content goals associated with each category. Most categories have three content goals.

The total column at the far right indicates the minimum number of times each student would be exposed to each GE goal. Thus speaking, integration, and ethical reasoning would be taught and assessed twice. Civic responsibility would be taught and assessed three times. Writing, critical and creative thinking, information literacy, teamwork, and problem-solving would be taught and assessed four times.

This "distribution" plan is open for discussion and negotiation. As we say, we surveyed units in order to create a distribution plan most likely to work for most GE courses in each category. Our intention is not to require a major transformation by any course; rather, we are hoping that courses can simply shift their pedagogical emphasis from the current skills goals to the two skills goals we have assigned to their category. If the units and faculty of a GE category feel that the two proposed skills goals would be difficult or impossible to teach and assess in their courses, we would welcome conversation about either managing the change or trading skills with another GE category.

Please visit the GE website for a more detailed view of the proposed distribution of goals.

**Rationale:** In 2008-09, the GEC identified teamwork, problem-solving, and civic responsibility as three AAC&U LEAP goals that would fit well with GVSU's liberal-education mission. (Please see the

“essential learning outcomes” at <http://www.aacu.org/leap/>.) Following two GE forums held in March 2009, we surveyed all units on campus in Fall 2009 and discovered that these three goals, and indeed all of the AAC&U LEAP goals, are widely supported within the academic majors. Adding the three new goals to the GE program will align the GE program both with the majors on campus and with the AAC&U guidelines for effective liberal education. GE and the academic majors partner with one another to help students develop the content and skills needed for academic and professional success. Students need to be exposed to these goals multiple times, and in multiple contexts, as they progress through their college careers.

The current approach to GE assessment is that all courses teach and assess all goals. Courses in all Foundations and Cultures categories teach and assess three skills goals: writing or speaking, critical and creative thinking, and information literacy. Courses in all upper-division (Themes) courses teach and assess five skills goals: writing, speaking, critical and creative thinking, information literacy, and integration. Our proposal is to distribute the GE skills goals through the program so that each course can focus on—and do a better job with—fewer goals.

**Implementation:** Given that many existing Foundations and Cultures courses would have to make at least some adjustments to their syllabi to reflect new goals, or a new emphasis on existing goals, and that all GE courses would have to develop (with GEC help) new Course Assessment Plans (CAPs) prior to the next round of assessment, we recommend working toward the Fall 2013 catalog for the implementation of these changes. That would give units and the GEC until roughly February 2012 to prepare and get approval of the new CAPs and make any other necessary changes.

## 2. Proposal to Revise the Upper-Level Component

We propose to shift the focus of the upper-level GE component from themes to issues. We also propose to achieve the “integration” goal *within* upper-level GE courses rather than *between* them, as has been the intention with Themes. Upper-level GE courses would be expected to teach and assess three GE skills goals: integration, teamwork, and problem-solving.

In addition, we propose to change from having nearly two dozen relatively small upper-level categories (Themes) to about half a dozen relatively large upper-level categories (Global Issues), which will allow for more choice (and fewer roadblocks) for students. And we propose to reduce the upper-level requirement from three courses to two.

With input from faculty and students, we would like to establish a half-dozen or so upper-level categories, each comprising courses derived initially, but not exclusively, from the current Themes. GEC began its work by discussing as possible upper-level categories some of the broad issues identified by the AAC&U as part of its “global learning” initiative:

- Health and Social Justice
- Sustainability and Interdependence
- Globalization, Wealth, and Poverty
- The Ethics of Global Citizenship
- Identity, Culture, and Border Crossings
- Religion in Global Contexts

For more information about the AAC&U global issues, please visit the GE website.

Although globalization is a worthwhile curricular goal for a GE program such as ours, the GEC would prefer to “loosen” the AAC&U list of issues and think of “global” as meaning both (or either) “international in scope” and “large and important.” Therefore, we present this list of what we would like to call global issues:

- Health and Human Development
- Sustainability
- Globalization
- Citizenship
- Identity and Culture
- Religion
- Communication and Media

Beyond softening the explicitly international scope of these issues, we added “Communication and Media,” which we feel represents a pressing global issue that has shaped and will continue to shape our lives and cultures.

Our aim is neither to define these categories too narrowly nor to use the categories to exclude existing courses. Indeed, our hope is to spur thinking around the university about how existing upper-level GE courses and potential new courses might help define these broad issues or suggest new or different issues. We believe that many existing GE courses could be strengthened and made even more relevant to students if we articulate how they connect to broad issues such as these. We also believe that these broad categories are flexible enough to contain a wide range of courses held together by their ability to contribute to the global conversation about pressing issues.

The Global Issues categories themselves are, in a way, less important than the Themes categories are. The idea of the Themes was to have students explore a theme from three disciplinary perspectives and then to integrate those perspectives as they move from one course to another. The thematic connections between courses were very important. The ultimate goal was to add to students’ knowledge of a theme by having them view it from multiple perspectives. However, the links between courses were generally never developed as they were intended, and for many students the Theme courses seemed isolated, not programmatic.

In contrast, the Global Issues upper-level component has different emphases:

- The ultimate aims will be to develop students’ ability to *integrate* disciplinary perspectives, *collaborate* with people from a range of academic backgrounds, and begin to *solve problems* of great importance to the world.
- Most courses will continue to be located in a discipline/department. Each course will have content that connects to a global issue—that is, to see how the course content contributes to the human conversation about the global issue.
- In the process of posing and addressing a problem, faculty will guide students from multiple majors to connect their coursework to learning in other fields. Students and faculty will reflect on how various disciplines can and do contribute to the same conversation.
- The students will work in integrative teams to begin the work of “solving” the problems presented by the course content and the overarching global issue.

Thus we propose to make all upper-level GE courses integrative problem-solving courses that encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration within each section. For example, a biology course in the “sustainability” category would both focus on the ways in which the field of biology can and does address sustainability and invite the students outside of biology to research and reflect on ways their own fields and other disciplines address sustainability. Together, then, the biology faculty member, the biology students, and the non-biology students in the class would work in teams to develop an understanding of potential solutions to the problem of sustainability in the world. Some courses would naturally focus on local, state, or national issues, but all issues would ultimately be placed in a global context. In this way, all upper-level GE courses would fit within one global issues category and pursue the GE skills goals of integration, teamwork, and problem-solving.

We also encourage faculty to develop explicitly interdisciplinary Global Issues courses to be listed as 400-level GE courses. These courses would be topic-focused and would require students to examine and integrate methodologies from multiple disciplines, with a focus on integrating those disciplinary perspectives. The focus in these courses would be on the process and skills needed for interdisciplinary teamwork, integration, and problem-solving.

Students would be required to take two Global Issues courses. As in the Themes, students would be required to choose two different disciplines (or the interdisciplinary GE 4xx course), both to heighten their multi-disciplinary experience and to ensure that students take at least one upper-level GE course outside of their major.

Unlike the current Themes requirement, we propose allowing students to choose to take their two courses either from a single category or from two different categories. Some students may prefer to focus on an issue (e.g., Health and Human Development), while others may not. Either way, students will experience two courses in which the course content is explicitly attached to a pressing global issue.

We invite units and faculty involved with GE to use the proposed list of global issues as a starting point for discussion. Many of our current Theme courses already touch on these kinds of issues, but we would like to make the connections more explicit. As a speculative exercise, the GEC attempted to assign each existing Theme course into one of the seven tentatively proposed categories. The faculty and departments that actually offer these courses should make the final call, but our speculative assignments convinced us that most or all current Theme courses could find a place in the new program. Once the categories themselves are set, we will invite faculty to submit new-course or course-change proposals that demonstrate how new or existing upper-level GE courses might fit within the general heading of the global issues as well as meet the new skills goals. Indeed, these course proposals will help us define each category.

**Rationale:** GEC remains committed to several aspects of the current Themes program. We believe that an upper-level, multi-disciplinary component makes for a stronger and more relevant GE program, as it underscores the fact that a university education is about more than developing knowledge and expertise within a major field of study. We also very much support the “integration” goal that has been the hallmark of the Themes program.

We also like the idea of having students choose a focus for their upper-level GE experience. On the other hand, we can see the benefit for some students of choosing courses from two different global issues.

The current Themes comprise 22 relatively small categories (6-15 courses each), making it difficult for some students to complete their Themes because of a lack of choice or a lack of course availability. Some Themes, with vague or abstract titles, suffer from a lack of “name recognition” among students, and some students have wondered how the Themes program adds to their overall marketability beyond the university. In short, some students wonder about the *relevance* of the Themes to their future lives.

Our proposal is to transform the current Themes program by building multi-disciplinarity and integration into each course, pursuing the goals of teamwork and problem-solving in each course, and connecting each course to a global issue widely recognized as crucial to humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also want to include only 300- and 400-level courses in the upper-level program. Our intention is to invite faculty to imagine or re-imagine courses and submit proposals and course-assessment plans that demonstrate how their courses will contribute to the upper-level component of GE.

This proposal has been guided in large part by the recent national conversation sponsored by the AAC&U. Here are just a few excerpts from that conversation:

- “The problems we face today and the challenges our graduates will confront with growing urgency are increasingly defined as global problems.... The interconnections and interdependencies of global systems have been mirrored in a surge of interdisciplinary research centers on campuses, yet many colleges and universities struggle to translate that knowledge and expertise into practices that help align general education curricula with expectations for educating students who can thrive in a global economy and become socially responsible and civically engaged leaders at home and abroad. General education designed for an *American Century* needs to be re-envisioned for a *Global Century*.”
- “In 2006, AAC&U commissioned a series of focus groups with business leaders, followed by a national survey to learn their impressions of how well colleges and universities prepare students for work. Business leaders thought that colleges were underemphasizing ‘Global Issues,’ with 72% urging greater attention.”
- “Global learning . . . is too often narrowly conceived as a study of cultures and difference, best addressed in the humanities. The *Shared Futures* initiative, by focusing on complex problems that require interdisciplinary approaches and integrative skills, insists that global learning can transform all three divisions of knowledge.”

We see the shift from “themes” to “global issues” as building on two aspects of the 1998-2000 revision of the GE program. That revision added the upper-level component, for one, but it also added the “Cultures” designations: the “U.S. Diversity” and “World Perspectives” categories. This revision proposes to maintain the upper-level component, the multi-disciplinary dimension, and the integration goal of the current program. It adds a global perspective to the upper-level component and promotes the skills of teamwork and problem-solving. For links to relevant AAC&U documents, please visit the GE website.

**Implementation:** Although this proposal clearly builds on the current Themes program, it does call on upper-level GE faculty to reorient existing courses around a global issue and the three skills goals of

integration, teamwork, and problem-solving. We anticipate a full round of information sessions and workshops to assist faculty in the transition, and all courses will require course-change or new-course proposals along with revised course-assessment plans and syllabi of record. To assist in the process, a shortened curriculum-approval process will be developed to accommodate the changes.

We recommend working toward the Fall 2013 catalog for the implementation of these changes. This would give units, the appropriate curriculum committees, and the GEC until roughly October 2012 to settle on the upper-division categories and make the necessary course changes prior to scheduling for the 2013-14 academic year.