

MEMORANDUM

TO: Gary Russi, Chair  
University Senate Steering Committee and  
University President

*Office of the President*

AUG 9 6 1996

FROM: Michael Smith, Chair *MS*  
Senate Committee on General Education, 1995-1996

**RECEIVED**

RE: Annual Report on Activities, 1995-1996

DATE: August 5, 1996

The members of the Senate Committee on General Education during the 1995-1996 year were Michael Smith, *Chair* (Linguistics), Walli Andersen (Rhetoric), Margaret Christensen (Nursing) (appointed to take the place of Clementine Rice early in Fall 1995 when Professor Rice was unable to attend meetings due to a scheduling conflict), Augustin Fosu (Economics), Barbara Mabee (Modern Languages), and Andre Slavin (Physics). Lizabeth Barclay served as an ex-officio member and as the committee's liason with the office of the Vice-President of Academic Affairs. Though an invitation was extended to the Student Congress to appoint a student member, no student members were appointed or attended committee meetings. The committee met approximately once a month during the Fall 1995 semester, and twice a month (biweekly) during the Winter 1996 semester.

As stipulated in the Senate's charge to the general education committee, the committee was very active this year on a number of fronts. First, it exercised its regular function as a curriculum committee for the university-wide general education program, both in its triennial review of one third of the general education field categories and in the approval of a new general education course in the natural science and technology field area (see below). Second, the committee continued its role as the final arbiter for petitions of exception to the general education program (a task which was reassumed by the committee during the previous (1994-1995) academic year after several years of delegating the task to the various committees on instruction had resulted in a lack of consistency in the granting of exceptions). The committee also discussed the status of the assessment of the general education program and prepared a report on the subject which has been forwarded to the university's assessment committee (a copy is attached to this report).

**A summary of accomplishments pertaining to the general education curriculum.** The general education committee reviewed the social science, international studies, and western civilization field area categories as a regular part of its review of the general education program. Early during the Fall 1995 semester Michael Smith, the committee chair, requested that the chairs of all academic units involved in these three areas of general education forward information about their general education courses (e.g. syllabi,

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tests, handouts, etc.) to the committee. The materials were then reviewed by committee members to make sure that the courses continue to meet the guidelines for general education at OU. The committee decided to reapprove all of the courses currently listed in the university catalog as satisfying these three field areas in general education. In its reports to the various academic units involved informing them of reapproval of their courses, the committee relayed several suggestions concerning how the courses might be improved.

The general education committee approved a new general education course in the natural science and technology field area: PHY 131 *The Physics of Cancer, Stroke, Heart Disease, and Headache*.

The committee drafted an official memo to advisors detailing procedures for approving transfer courses to meet requirements in general education at OU (see appended document). The memo was sent to all campus advisors. The committee wishes to thank Jennifer Gilroy, Assistant Registrar for Records, for her help in drafting this memo and distributing it to the advising network on campus.

The committee approved a request from the UCUI to approve a proposed catalog change submission form which contains a provision for general education committee approval of any catalog changes affecting university-wide general education requirements.

Next year the general education committee will conduct the regular triennial review of the math-logic-computer science, language, and natural science and technology field categories.

**Petitions of exception:** The general education committee considered 47 petitions of exception and approved most of the petitions submitted for its review (details are contained in the meeting minutes). The approved petitions usually involved students who presented coursework from another college or university which, while not exactly equivalent to a general education course at OU, nevertheless was determined by the committee to meet the spirit of the OU requirements. Other requests involved deciding whether a student who is lacking a few credits in general education (usually due to transfers of 3-unit courses from other institutions) could still satisfy the OU requirements. These requests were almost always approved.

A large set of petitions (15) was granted for the one-time course LIT 375 *The Era of World War II in International Literature* (offered during Winter 1996) which was deemed to meet the general education requirement for literature, but which was not planned by the Modern Language Department as a permanent course. Since there is no mechanism for one-time-only approvals, the committee decided to automatically grant a waiver to any student in the course who wanted to have it count for the general education literature requirement. The petitions were then filed with the registrar for documentation as they came in for committee approval.

The committee decided that it should be informed any time a course designated as a general education course is deleted from the catalog (though it does not need to approve the deletion, which should be a matter for the academic unit involved). But when a department or other academic unit wants to change anything about a general education course (i.e. numbers, descriptions, title, etc.), the general education committee must approve such requests.

The general education committee spent some time discussing a petition from a student (Karen Skalny) who requested permission to waive a majority of OU general education requirements because she is working on a second degree at OU. She presented relatively few courses from her first degree work that would clearly transfer as general education courses at OU, and she argued that, since she already had a bachelors degree from another accredited institution (Wayne State), she should be exempt from having to take general education courses for a second degree. After much deliberation, the committee decided that the student would have to fully satisfy OU's general education requirements, because the OU catalog clearly states that 2nd degree candidates must meet the same requirements as first degree candidates (see the attached memo on this matter summarizing the committee's rationale for not waiving general education requirements for Ms. Skalny, which was sent by the general education committee chair to Ms. Skalny's advisor in the Engineering School).

**Assessment of general education at OU:** In December 1995, Brian Goslin of the university's assessment committee and Laura Schartman of OIRA met with the committee to discuss the beginning process of assessment of the general education program at OU. Their input was valuable to the committee when it met to formulate a report to the assessment committee on the current status of the assessment of general education at OU (see attached report).

The committee found that, based on the first set of results obtained from one of the assessment instruments (The Kansas State IDEA Survey), student perceptions and attitudes about their experiences in the general education courses in the western civilization, international studies, and social science field categories (i.e. the field categories which were under review this year) were acceptable, since the mean of their responses to questions concerning their perceived rate of progress in the courses tended to fall in the average to above-average range on a 5-point Likert scale. The gist of the committee's recommendations to the assessment committee about the assessment of general education is that the current instruments should be continued for the near future, so that at least one full set of data can be gathered and analyzed for all the general education field categories using the same set of instruments. At some point in the future, the general education committee, working in tandem with the assessment committee, may decide to revamp the assessment of general education, especially with regard to developing more refined instruments for measuring student achievement outcomes in the various field categories.

Once again, the committee would like to highlight and applaud the important role played by Jennifer Gilroy, Assistant Registrar for Records, in providing the committee with information which aided its deliberations in deciding petitions of exception, and in bringing committee members up to date regarding how transfer courses are evaluated for general education at OU. We could not have conducted business successfully without her input. As a matter of fact, the Senate Steering Committee might consider appointing a representative of the Registrar's Office as a full-time ex-officio member of the general education committee from now on, due to the continuing need of the committee for accurate information from that office when deliberating petitions of exception.

Laura Schartman of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment was also of great help in providing the committee with information about assessing general education programs and in arranging to have summaries of the assessment instruments prepared for the committee's use.

Prepared for the general education committee by

*Michael B. Smith*

Michael B. Smith, Chair (1995-1996)