Approval Process for General Education Packages

In this newsletter we highlight the approval process for packages in the General Education Program. This process has been developed over the past year by an ad hoc subcommittee of General Education Council. The subcommittee consisted of a chairperson and the five representatives from each of the five colleges. I would like to thank the subcommittee members—Herb Amato (chair), Princewill Anyalebechi (CISAT), Tom DeVore (CSM), Beth Eck (CAL), Reg Foucar-Szocki (COB) and Challace McMillin (CEP)—for their fine work and careful consideration of the process and the issues involved.

The subcommittee was asked by the GenEd Council to design a process that kept all review of courses in the appropriate college C&I committees, but gave the General Education Council responsibility for review of packages and judgment about their appropriateness for general education. In addition, GenEd Council asked that for package approval purposes, the faculty and student members of the council would constitute a General Education C & I Committee. Other important considerations were that we wanted to continue to encourage experimental package development where appropriate and to reserve formal approval of particular packages until we could assess student learning.

An initial draft proposal for the package approval process was sent to all college C & I committees and to all cluster committees for review and comment. The subcommittee then worked to address concerns raised and to continue to refine and clarify the stages of the process. The approval process developed over the past year through these ongoing discussions was formally approved in October by General Education Council and by Academic Council.

The key features of the approval process are that all courses go through the C & I process in the appropriate college(s), and that package approval is a two tier process that happens in two phases. The approval of packages first at the Cluster Committee level and then at the level of the General Education Council is designed to parallel the college approval process that begins in schools or departments and progresses to a college C & I Committee. The two phases of approval begin with package endorsement for initial offering before a package is taught for the first time. After a package has been taught twice, it is reevaluated for formal approval, taking into account evidence of student learning. At both the endorsement and the approval phase, there are multiple opportunities for discussion between package originators, colleges and departments/schools, and the Cluster Committee. All proposals are sent to all college C & I committees and to Library and Educational Technologies for review and comment. Both endorsement and approval take into account how well the package meets cluster objectives, as well as its adherence to the mission and philosophy of the program and the “Guiding Principles for Packages.”

These “Guiding Principles for Packages” are found on the back page of the newsletter. While the guiding principles were originally adopted in 1996, the council recently reviewed and amended them in light of the approval process and the experience of program implementation.

Questions? Call the General Education Office at x2852 or Email Violet Allain (allainvl), Herb Amato (amatohk) or me (halperlc).

- Linda Cabe Halpern
General Education New Package Approval Process

Preamble - This approval process is for packages within General Education. All packages are reviewed on a five year cycle. Course approvals are the responsibility of the appropriate C&I committees of the colleges at JMU.

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I. ENDORSEMENT PHASE

Part 1

A. Develop package according to cluster objectives, guiding principles for packages and GenEd philosophy
   - Courses may be experimental (Must have Experimental Course Form on file)
   - Ongoing discussion with contributing departments & colleges

B. Receive endorsement from the Cluster Committee
   - Use Endorsement Phase Approval Form
   - Use matrix for mapping objectives and courses

C. Receive package endorsement from the GenEd Council
   - Endorsement is not a promise of approval

D. Offer package
   - Package enrollment is determined by package originators, department heads involved with the package and the appropriate cluster coordinator

Part 2

A. Seek recommendations & input from the Cluster Committee after initial offering of the package

B. Seek recommendations & input from contributing departments & colleges, & Library and Educational Technologies

C. Offer package for the second time following recommendations
   - All courses must be offered at least twice before final package approval is granted
   - No package may be offered for more than three years within the endorsement phase

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II. Go to Approval Phase

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From Approval Phase

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A. Seek recommendations & input from the Cluster Committee after initial offering of the package
II. APPROVAL PHASE

A. Receive package approval from the Cluster Committee
   - Course approval must already be completed by the appropriate College C & I Committees
   - Recommendation for package approval will be based on a full evaluation, including assessment data (evidence of student learning) and judgment of how well package meets cluster objectives, guiding principles for packages and GenEd philosophy.

B. Send package to all College C & I Committees and Library & Educational Technologies for initial review and comments
   - Comments go back to the Cluster Committee (within 15 days)

C. Cluster Committee reviews comments
   - Communication occurs between Cluster Committee & package originators
   - Questions and comments are responded to by the Cluster Committee to the appropriate College C & I Committee or Library and Educational Technologies (within 15 days)
   - Changes made if necessary and package sent to GenEd Council C&I Committee

D. Receive package approval from the GenEd Council C & I Committee
E. Receive package approval from the GenEd Council
F. Receive package approval by Dean of GenEd
G. Post on Web bulletin board
   - Accessible to faculty for 15 days
H. Hard copies sent back to College C&I Committees and Library & Educational Technologies
I. Questions and concerns to be resolved by GenEd Council
   - Communication between Dean, Cluster Committee, GenEd Council and package originators
   - Questions and comments are responded to by the GenEd Council (within 15 days)
J. Receive package approval from VPAA
K. New Package Approved
General Education Program
Guiding Principles for Packages

1. The underlying principles of the General Education Program are described in its Philosophy and Mission statements. The Philosophy and Mission statements, printed in the undergraduate catalog, are the foundation of the General Education Program.

2. The General Education Program is described by its goals stated in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience. These goals describe the broad areas of knowledge, skills, and experiences that every educated person should have. Each cluster is responsible for providing students with opportunities to learn in all three areas.

3. The General Education Program is effected in the classroom through the learning objectives specified for each cluster. The objectives for each cluster bring the program to life within the classroom. Since the objectives represent the careful work of many faculty members, changes to these objectives will be approved by the General Education Council only after the consideration and recommendation by the appropriate Cluster Committee.

4. Each package must meet all the objectives of a given cluster. Since the program is effected through its learning objectives, each path through the program must address all the objectives.

5. Each package and cluster must introduce students to a broad area of human knowledge, with specific attention paid to interrelationships, not just to specific disciplines or bodies of knowledge. Our students need to function responsibly in a complex world with many competing messages. They need a level of social, cultural, and scientific literacy that will help them sift through information to determine the value, strength, relevance and credibility of various positions.

6. Cluster One provides fundamental skills, which must be reinforced in all clusters. The important skills that make up Cluster One—writing, speaking, information retrieval and technology, and critical thinking—are essential and foundational skills for success in college and in life. Each cluster is responsible for ensuring that students develop and refine these necessary skills.

7. All packages must be appropriate for and available to all General Education students, not restricted to or designed only for certain majors or professional programs. All packages will be judged and approved according to their appropriateness to general education. The general rule for inclusion of first courses in the major is that their approach be suitable for all students in the General Education Program. Specific packages may, however, be recommended for particular majors and professional programs when they include courses required by the major or professional program.

8. Major and professional programs may choose to require courses that are part of the General Education Program, so long as they are clearly listed in the catalog as major requirements. In other words, double counting between majors and the General Education Program is acceptable. However, no major may create “hidden requirements” in general education by making a general education course a prerequisite to courses in the major but not listing the prerequisite as a major requirement.

9. Each package must have a stated plan for integrating or sequencing the courses.

10. There will be agreed-upon areas of consistency across all sections of a particular course. Since packages are built on sequenced or integrated courses, this integration must be consistent from section to section. In addition, students deserve consistent requirements across sections of the same course.

11. The number of packages in a cluster should not exceed five, although exceptions may be approved. The main reason is practical—the sequencing and scheduling of sections will become increasingly difficult as the number of packages increases.

12. No package will be approved which depends upon idiosyncratic courses taught by only one or two faculty members. Again, this is an issue of practicality. No sequenced package can survive if not offered every semester or if a student does not have several sections to choose from each semester. Furthermore, courses in a cross-disciplinary curriculum should be designed so that they are broad-based enough that a number of faculty members should be able to teach the material.

13. Each cluster will have a single assessment procedure. These will not be differentiated by package. Since each cluster has its own specific learning objectives common to all packages, students will be assessed by the common cluster objectives.

14. The evaluation and development of the program will be ongoing. Assessment data and other evaluation procedures will be used to promote continuous development and strengthening of the program.

15. Package approvals are for five years. No package will continue to be offered after five years unless it receives new formal approval.

16. In general, the participation of part-time faculty and graduate students in courses within the General Education Program should be limited. The strength and success of the General Education Program depend on the strength of the faculty. We expect the best qualified and most experienced full-time teachers to participate in the program for stability and academic excellence. The program, however, welcomes other fully qualified, committed, and excellent teachers.