General Education: The Human Community

Curriculum and Instruction Handbook

September 2013

General Education
Curriculum and Instruction Handbook

Table of Contents

Introduction

Since its inception in 1997-8, General Education: *The Human Community* has encouraged experimentation, evaluation, and faculty input. To that end, the curriculum process for the program was initially designed to facilitate the development of new courses embedded within sequences of integrated learning called packages. But increasing demands on the program over the years and the steady shift away from packages necessitated periodic revisions to the program's curriculum handbook. In 2008 the University implemented an online curriculum system that prompted a broader reconsideration of the paperwork and procedures that General Education traditionally employed. The following pages, then, reflect the current state of the program and its ongoing engagement with the campus community. The General Education Council (GEC) approved this new handbook in Spring 2013.

The core elements of the General Education curriculum process remain as they were in 1997-8. Course approvals and modifications are still vested in the appropriate college C&I committees, and the General Education Council (GEC) retains responsibility for determining if a course meets the relevant program outcomes and is therefore appropriate for inclusion in one of its clusters. Clusters are structured in a variety of ways: areas, groups, tiers, or tracks. The structure of a cluster divides its goals and objectives into subsets, and each subset is satisfied by selecting one course from an approved set that maps to the subset's outcomes. By approving courses for inclusion into a cluster structure, the General Education curriculum process ensures that the program's goals and objectives will be met.

In contrast to the original process, which required two phases of approval before a course permanently entered the program, there is now only one. (A detailed outline of the steps required and how they interface with the online curriculum system can be found starting on page 6.) This process integrates General Education approvals into the online procedures that begin in schools or departments and progress to college C&I Committees. Thus, approval by a cluster committee corresponds to approval at the department or Academic Unit level and approval by the GEC corresponds to approval at the College level. By retaining opportunities for off-line, face-to-face meetings, the new process ensures that there will be ample discussion among the course's originator(s), the host department and college, their C&I committees, the relevant cluster committee, and the GEC. In addition, because proposals for all new courses are developed online and posted to the university-wide C& I website, all faculty have additional opportunities to examine and comment on the courses that are under consideration for general education credit.

Finally, in order to ensure continued alignment of new courses with the program's goals and objectives, all permanently approved courses will be reevaluated during cluster self studies, which take place at seven year intervals. These cluster-level reviews parallel those undertaken by program in other academic units on campus. A full program review occurs every seven years. For a complete calendar of the review cycle, see page 11.

General Education Council Responsibilities and Membership

Responsibilities

The General Education Council (GEC) oversees JMU's general education program, *The Human Community*. Any proposed changes to the goals or learning objectives of the program must be approved by a quorum vote of the GEC. For curriculum approval purposes, all voting members of the GEC constitute the General Education C&I Committee. The GEC only receives proposals regarding specific curricular actions as recommendations from the Cluster Committees. Upon receipt of a recommendation, the Council members review it to determine appropriateness for meeting the objectives of the relevant cluster, the program's "Guiding Principles," and its overall goals. The council then votes on each recommendation.

The types of curricular matters overseen by the GEC include approvals and deletions of program courses; modifications of program courses, including title and number changes; and modifications of the program overall. The GEC should have an active role in promoting opportunities for faculty development related to General Education Program.

In November 2009, the GEC voted to create the position of Curriculum and Instruction Chair. The term of service is two years with the tenure staggered to overlap that of the GEC Chair and with multiple consecutive terms permissible. Duties of the position are as follows:

- Chairs the General Education Council when it acts in its capacity as a C&I committee;
- Coordinates curriculum proposals for the GEC (this entails ensuring that proposals are posted to the GEC Blackboard site in time for voting);
- Acts as a resource for C&I questions (entails familiarity with C&I procedures);
- Votes in Online Curriculum System on behalf of GEC;
- Serves on C&I Chairs committee.

Curricular changes approved by the GEC are forwarded as recommendations to the VPAA. Recommendations for significant modification to the general education program are also submitted to the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP).

Changes to the curricular process within the general education program are also made by a vote of the GEC, providing those changes are consistent with university policy.

In matters of policy and direction of the general education program, the GEC is advisory to the Cluster Coordinators and the Vice Provost of University Programs.

Membership

The GEC consists of the following members:

- Chairperson* (non-voting, except in cases of tie votes).
- General Education Program administrators, the Associate Vice Provost of General Education (nonvoting), and the Cluster Coordinators (5 voting members).
- Cluster Representatives, who must be full time faculty members elected by their respective cluster (5 voting members).
  - Candidates for these positions must be faculty who teach in the program and have at least 50% of their duties designated as "instructional," i.e., related primarily to the classroom and non-administrative functions.
- College Representatives, who must be full time faculty members elected by their respective College Faculty or College Council (6 voting members).
  - Candidates for these positions must be faculty who teach in the program and have at least 50% of their duties designated as "instructional," i.e., related primarily to the classroom and non-administrative functions.
- University Representatives, who will include one representative each from those units that are key stakeholders in the program.
  - Faculty Senate, Libraries and Educational Technologies, Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS), Career & Academic Planning (CAP) (4 voting members).
- A Student Representative from the SGA (1 voting member).
- Term of Office: Three years for all university representatives with the exception of faculty senate and SGA. Their term of office will be for one-year.

1. Term Limit: Two consecutive 3-year terms.
2. Attend monthly meetings; College, Cluster, University and SGA representatives should designate a substitute when absent. If extended absences are anticipated, a new appointment should be pursued.
3. *GEC Chairperson
   The Chairperson serves for 2 years and must have served on GEC and be familiar with the General Education Program prior to his/her election. In consultation with General Education Program staff, the Chairperson sets the agenda for General Education Council Meetings. He/she provides guidance during years when the General Education Program Academic Program Review (APR) is being conducted.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Philosophy

General Education: *The Human Community* is the common core academic program of James Madison University in which students come to understand how distinct disciplines look at the world from different vantage points. Courses in *The Human Community* are organized into five clusters, each emphasizing unique tools, rationales, and methodologies. Taken together, courses in a student's chosen major and *The Human Community* complement and complete each other. Both are integral and essential components of a student's full and proper education.

Mission

In the Liberal Arts tradition, General Education: *The Human Community* aspires to create informed global citizens of the 21st century. We challenge our community of students and faculty to engage in personal and collective reflection, development, and action.

Goals

- Students will understand the historical and contemporary distinctions and interconnections among people, institutions, and communities that create, preserve, and transmit culture and knowledge in the arts, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and humanities.
- Students will become skilled in questioning, investigating, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating.
- Students will participate in a variety of aesthetic and civic experiences reflecting human concerns and values that transcend the limits of specialization.

Structure

The Human Community credit hour requirements are as follows:

Cluster	Credits
Skills for the 21st Century	9
Arts and Humanities	9
The Natural World	10
Social and Cultural Processes	7
Individuals in the Human Community	6

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAM CURRICULUM

1. *General Education: The Human Community* is the core curriculum for all JMU students regardless of major or program of study. Its purpose is to provide students with a liberal education that emphasizes connections across academic disciplines.

2. *General Education: The Human Community* is based on learning objectives rather than courses, and these objectives are divided into clusters. Each cluster provides students with learning opportunities that address its specific objectives.

3. Any change to the learning objectives must first be approved by the relevant cluster committees and then the General Education Council (GEC).

4. Any change to the organization of a cluster (e.g., its groups, tracks, areas, domains, or requirements) must first be approved by the relevant cluster committees and then the GEC.

5. Every course in the program must meet the learning objectives for its intended area within a cluster and should be suitable for the general population of students. In addition, there should be areas of consistency across sections of a particular course, agreed-upon among the faculty who teach it.

6. All students complete Cluster One during their first academic year at JMU because critical thinking, oral and written communication, and information literacy are foundational to inquiry in the human community. All clusters are responsible for reinforcing the learning objectives initiated in Cluster One.

7. Major, minor, and pre-professional programs may choose to require courses that are part of *General Education: The Human Community*, so long as these requirements are clearly listed in the catalog. However, no major, minor, or pre-professional program can require its students to take a particular course in Cluster One.

8. The number of courses in an area of a cluster shall be limited in order to accommodate scheduling and to promote coherence in the cluster.

9. Any course included in the program must be designed so that multiple faculty members can teach it and should be offered in multiple sections every semester. If

exceptional circumstances warrant them, alternative scheduling arrangements may be permitted, pending consideration by the relevant administrators.

10. Each cluster will have a procedure to assess students' ability to meet its learning objectives. Assessment data will be used to promote continuous development and strengthening of each cluster.

11. The evaluation and development of the program will be ongoing. Curriculum reviews for each Cluster will occur on a seven-year rotation with a full program review following the last cluster review in the cycle.

12. The stability and academic excellence of *General Education: The Human Community* depends upon fully qualified, experienced, and committed faculty. In general, the participation of part-time instructors and graduate students in the program should be limited.

NEW COURSE APPROVAL PROCESS

This detailed outline explains the steps required to develop a new course proposal and obtain approval for credit within the General Education program

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1. A faculty member interested in developing a new course for inclusion in General Education: The Human Community should first consult with the relevant department head and cluster coordinator to assess its feasibility from each unit's perspective. No course can be considered unless it has one or more home departments willing to house and staff it. Verbal authorization to proceed should be secured from both units before proceeding to the next step.

2. The originator creates the proposal using the online curriculum system (http://www.jmu.edu/curriculum/OCS.shtml). The new course is developed under the originator's academic unit subject identifier *(e.g. HIST, SOCI, HTH).* When the proposal is ready to post for Academic Level review, the originator should answer "yes" to the question in Step 2, "Will this course affect General Education?", and complete the two questions that follow. Selecting "yes" directs the online system to generate an email to the General Education program so that the cluster coordinator may be notified that the course has begun the official University approval process. (For online voting purposes, the coordinator serves as "academic unit head" for the cluster.) Offline, the originator should also complete a General Education Curriculum Action Form (available from the General Education program website) and attach to it a) a full syllabus; b) a matrix that maps the objectives to the content of the proposed course; and c) a narrative document that explains the matrix. The completed Curriculum Action Form should be sent to the coordinator.

3. The coordinator circulates the proposal, cluster approval form, syllabus, matrix, and narrative to the cluster committee during the standard 15-day academic review period and convenes a meeting to ensure full discussion and evaluation. Verbal approval by a majority of the committee members is required to proceed to the next step.

4. After the appropriate number of days has elapsed, the Academic Unit approvers, the department head, and the cluster coordinator all vote on the proposal using the online system. If the cluster committee did not approve the course and the cluster coordinator voted "no" in the online system, the course may still move forward to the College level as a departmental offering only. If, however, the committee did approve it and the coordinator voted "yes," then that "yes" vote directs the online system to email both the General Education Council's C&I Chair and the Vice Provost of University Programs so that they may view the proposal and vote on it at the College level.

5. Once the proposal is made available for College level review, the GEC C&I Chair will post the proposal, cluster approval form, syllabus, matrix, and narrative to the GEC Blackboard site for review.
6. At the next scheduled GEC meeting, the cluster coordinator will propose the course for inclusion in the program. If the GEC votes "yes," the course is approved to receive general education credit, but only if the course is also approved by the College C&I committee.
7. At the end of the College level review period, the GEC C&I Chair (on behalf of the GEC) and the Vice Provost of University Programs vote via the online system. Their votes are cast at the same time as those of the sponsoring college's Dean and the chair of the College C&I Committee.
8. In the online system, the proposal then moves to the University level, where it can be reviewed and commented on by all faculty members. If any serious concerns arise from other colleges or programs, the proposal is submitted to CAP.
    a. Questions and concerns raised in CAP will be referred to the General Education Council for resolution.
    b. All questions will be answered, but formal response is limited to those groups with curricular standing—the college C&I Committees and the Libraries and Learning technologies unit.
9. After the fifteen day reviewing period ends, the VPAA reviews it.
10. If the VPAA approves it, the proposal now appears in the online system under "Approved Courses." The university C&I process is complete and the course is ready for inclusion in the catalog, the general education checklist, and any official websites.
11. The course is offered for general education credit in the next semester. Enrollment for this offering will be determined by the originator, department heads and/or deans involved, and the appropriate cluster coordinator. The department head will oversee entry of the course into the e-campus system.
12. After the course's initial offering, the originator meets with the coordinator to evaluate how well the course met cluster objectives, program "Guiding Principles," and general education philosophy, as well as any practical issues of implementation, such as enrollment and resource issues. This information will be included in the cluster annual report.
13. A full evaluation of this course and all other courses in the cluster will be undertaken during the cluster's next self-study and during the full program review. If a self-study or program review shows that a course no longer meets the relevant objectives, then the course may be recommended for deletion from the General Education program. A description of this process may be found on page 10.

EXPERIMENTAL COURSE APPROVAL PROCESS

The university handbook states that:

> Experimental courses are designed to allow faculty to undertake curriculum development in areas of importance to their department/school, their college, or to the university. Experimental courses permit faculty to explore innovation with a minimum of risk. It is assumed that only a percentage of courses that are developed experimentally will ultimately become a permanent part of the curriculum. In general, experimental courses can only be offered for two academic years prior to their full approval by the appropriate Curriculum and Instruction Committee(s) for insertion in the curriculum. Courses can be offered at any level from 100-900. Experimental courses are designated by department/school or college designators (for example, an experimental course at the 200 level in the Department of History might be labeled HIST 200E; an experimental course offered as part of the College of Business core curriculum might be labeled COB 300E).

> All courses offered on an experimental basis must include a plan for evaluation of their effectiveness. The results of this evaluation must be forwarded to the appropriate C&I Committee(s) if the course is ultimately submitted for permanent inclusion in the curriculum. Experimental courses are not posted to the Curriculum website, nor are they reviewed by the College C&I Committee. Experimental courses must be approved by the appropriate department head(s)/school director(s) and then be forwarded to the dean(s) for approval. Courses that have completed the experimental phase of their development must be submitted through the regular curriculum approval process to be permanently included in the curriculum.

Experimental courses may be proposed for General Education credit. Course proposers pursuing this option should consult the appropriate cluster coordinator early in the process. Proposers must file a complete Experimental Course Form and a signed Experimental Course Signature Form—signed by the appropriate department head(s) and dean(s)--with University Programs. These forms may be obtained at
https://secureweb.jmu.edu/curric/formssecure.html. Additional hard copies of the completed forms should be submitted to the relevant cluster coordinator along with a completed General Education Curricular Action form, including a syllabus, a matrix, and a narrative explaining the course meets the goals and objectives (see form for details). The coordinator will circulate these materials to the cluster committee for consideration. If approved, the coordinator will ensure that proper notice is sent to the registrar's office so that students receive General Education credit for the course. Approval of the GEC is not required for Experimental Courses. If, however, after running it as an experimental course the proposer seeks to propose the course as a permanent offering, he or she must begin the formal process that begins on page 6 of this handbook.

COURSE REMOVAL PROCESS

A proposal to delete an approved course from the General Education program may originate in a cluster committee, a contributing department, or a College C&I Committee. The proposal originators should first consult with the appropriate cluster coordinator and submit to him or her a completed General Education Curricular Action Form. The coordinator submits the form to the cluster committee for thorough review and seeks feedback from contributing departments and other constituencies. If the cluster committee approves the proposal to delete, then the Curricular Action Form is brought before the General Education Council for a decision. If the General Education Council votes to delete the course, the appropriate signature form is submitted to the Vice Provost of University Programs and the proposal is posted by the GEC C&I Chair on the online curriculum system at the University level for a fifteen-day review period. During that fifteen-day period, paper copies of the form may be submitted to the College C&I Committees, to Library and Educational Technologies, and to the Committee on Academic Programs for their information. If the online posting generates no questions or concerns, then the course is deleted. Any questions and concerns related to the deletion of the course must be resolved by the General Education Council and/or the appropriate cluster committee in a timely manner.

Structure Approval, Modification, or Deletion Process

Any change to the organization of a cluster (e.g. its arrangement of groups, tracks, areas, domains or requirements) constitutes a change to its structure. A proposal to change a cluster's organizational structure may originate in a cluster committee, an academic department, or a College C&I Committee. Examples of possible proposals include but are not limited to the following: the creation or deletion of a track; the inclusion of a new group or area; and the addition of non-credit bearing requirement. The proposal originators should first consult with the appropriate cluster coordinator and submit to him or her a completed General Education Curricular Action Form. The coordinator submits the form to the cluster committee for thorough review and seeks feedback from contributing departments and other constituencies. If the cluster committee votes to approve the proposal, then the Curricular Action Form is brought before the General Education Council for a decision. If the General Education Council approves the proposal, the Curricular Action form is signed by the Vice Provost of University Programs and the General Education program staff takes the necessary steps to make the change effective for fall of the next academic year.

Proposals that would significantly modify the General Education program, such as a proposal to alter its total number of credit hours, must be submitted to the Committee on Academic Programs after approval by the GEC. Through the CAP chair, copies of the form are submitted to the College C&I Committees and to Library and Educational Technologies for their information. Any questions and concerns arising within CAP must be resolved by the General Education Council and/or the appropriate cluster committee in a timely manner. If the CAP approves the proposal, then it moves to the Provost's office.

General Education Curriculum Review Timeline

The program undergoes regular review. Each cluster coordinator submits to the Vice Provost of University Programs an annual report that addresses administrative issues such as enrollments, assessment, staffing, and resources. Clusters 1 and 3 also submit an annual report to the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV). In AY2006-07, the General Education Program initiated cluster self studies; these reports replaced an earlier review process, dating to the program's origins, which did not fit the program's mature structure. Cluster self studies take place on a seven-year rotating basis. A full academic program review takes place at the end of the cycle. The timeline is as follows:

2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5	Annual Report Cluster 1-5
SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3	SCHEV Report Cluster 1 & 3
Cluster Review Cluster 1	Cluster Review Cluster 2	Cluster Review Cluster 3	Cluster Review Cluster 5	Cluster Review Cluster 4		*RESPONSE to APR*	Cluster Review Cluster 1
					Gen.Educ. APR		

Cluster Self-Study Review Processes/Procedures

Cluster self studies have several vital functions. They aid in the planning and evaluation of curriculum. They also provide the basis for future program development, effective utilization of resources, and enrollment management. Final reports are typically used in the following ways:

- Facilitates review of cluster objectives and goals
- Supports the development of cluster priorities
- Contributes to cluster strategic planning
- Assists in resource allocation

The procedures that follow are consistent with the university-wide process begun in 1993 and outlined in Academic Program Review Guidelines (Available through the Office of the Provost at http://www.jmu.edu/acadaffairs/APR/). They have been modified, however, to reflect the specific structure of the General Education Program.

Composition of the Self-Study Team

Each cluster's self-study will be undertaken by its cluster committee, which serves the place of the self-study team that would be appointed from among faculty in a unit or department. The cluster coordinator acts as chair of the full self-study committee; in this role, he or she develops timelines and monitors progress. Subcommittees may also be formed, as appropriate.

Identification of Self-Study Goals and Methods/Approaches

First, each cluster must identify the major goals it wants to achieve. Examples of goals that have been undertaken in previous self-studies include the following:

- To reflect on student satisfaction with the coursework provided by the cluster
- To reflect on faculty satisfaction with the rigor and success of the cluster
- To consider how the cluster advances university-wide initiatives (such as diversity)
- To evaluate how the cluster reinforces Cluster One objectives
- Determine the level of resources supporting the cluster currently and the level needed in the future to maintain and improve offerings.
- Report on the mechanism under development to manage enrollment in the cluster.
- Examine the special needs and conditions in Track II of Cluster Three.

The cluster committee must also consider the types of evidence it will need to gather and the methodology it will employ to collect it. In the past, committees have surveyed both colleagues who teach in the cluster and students who were either enrolled in or completed the cluster. Committees have also consulted with other relevant stakeholders, such as library

liaisons or department heads. Like other APRs, cluster self studies should incorporate evidence collected over time, as well as the kind that is immediately available or specifically generated during the self-study period. Previous reports, archived syllabi, assessment data, and enrollment figures are especially useful for showing change over time.

Curriculum Review

Self studies serve as the primary means of evaluating the function and delivery of individual courses within the cluster. This task is achieved by: 1) determining how well each course meets the stated objectives for its area of the program; 2) considering enrollment management and staffing questions; 3) examining how well the cluster reinforces Cluster One skills; and 4) evaluating how well students are learning what they are expected to learn as a result of their experiences in a given cluster.

The following table suggests how the benchmarks may be evaluated.

Benchmark	Criteria for Success	How evaluated?	Action taken if not met
1.) Courses fulfill objectives	Assignments, coverage, depth, pedagogies address outcomes and are appropriate for broad population; students who take the course score appropriately on assessment instrument	Syllabus review; Assessment reports; faculty/student surveys and focus groups	Identify reasons for failure to address outcomes and consider solutions; Self study team makes formal recommendation to GEC and communicates its concerns to relevant faculty. If after two years benchmark remains unmet, course removal may be initiated
2a) Course availability/enrollments meet university needs	# seats/sections is adequate (reasonable number of empty seats, few overrides, no backlogs; course offered various times of day; online courses meet university guidelines, etc.); # and range of courses in cluster is sufficient	ISAPPS (Information Systems Applications) data; cluster annual reports	Identify reasons for enrollment management problems and consider solutions; Self study team makes formal recommendation to GEC and communicates its concerns to relevant AUH. If after two years, benchmark remains unmet,

			course removal may be initiated.
2b) Courses are appropriately staffed	% FT vs. PT; % instructors with terminal degrees; % of instructors who have taught a specific course multiple times	Faculty survey; ISAPPS (Information Systems Applications) data	Identify reasons for staffing problems and consider solutions; Self study team makes formal recommendation to GEC and communicates with relevant AUH to address concerns. If after two years, benchmark remains unmet, course removal may be initiated.
3.) Courses reinforce the skills initiated in Cluster One	Critical thinking, informational literacy, oral and written communication are embedded	Syllabus review; Assessment reports; faculty/student surveys and focus groups	Identify reasons for lack of reinforcement and consider solutions; Self study team makes formal recommendation to GEC and communicates with relevant AUH to address concerns. If after two years, benchmark remains unmet, course removal may be initiated.
4. Students are learning the unique content, skills, tools, rationales, and methodologies associated with the cluster	Active student learning is taking place as demonstrated by assessment data; Course content and assignments show change over time as assessment data is fed back into the curriculum	Syllabus review; Assessment reports; annual cluster reports; focus groups; faculty surveys	Determine why students are not learning and consider appropriate solutions, such as course revisions. Self study team makes recommendations to GEC.