

Final Report of the Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) Rubric Subcommittee

In October 2013, a subcommittee of the Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) was convened to review the rubric and criteria used by CUE when considering undergraduate courses to include as part of the General Education Program (GEP).

Members of this subcommittee included: Donna Burton, Adrianna Kirkman, Herle McGowan (chair), Jeannette Moore, Andy Nowel, David Parish, Aaron Stoller, and Karen Young. Catherine Freeman and Barbara Kirby served as ex officio members; Gina Neugebauer served as committee support.

The charge to this subcommittee was to:

1. Review the current rubric criteria and revise criteria used to evaluate a course that is being considered to satisfy General Education Program (GEP) category objectives.
2. Make necessary recommendations to improve the GEP course review and selection process.
3. Clarify criteria defining open seats, pre-requisites, and other restrictions.
4. Define criteria for lower and upper division GEP courses and determine if they are of a broad focus, or rather a narrow one as defined by SACS, our accrediting body.
5. Determine how well GEP information including the rationale and criteria for general education courses is communicated to our university community and external constituents.
6. Determine if the inventory of courses provides ample but appropriate opportunities for students to complete their general education program and make timely progress toward graduation. Provide recommendations to address any issues or concerns.

Clarifying and improving the course review process for new and existing GEP courses. (*Charges 1, 2, 3, 5*)

A major contribution of the subcommittee was a revision to the forms process required for courses to be reviewed by CUE. The result is a collection of new course submission forms. For each GEP category, there is now a single form that replaces both the “short form” and the evaluation rubric, and also directly incorporates additional course information that was previously included as a separate attachment prepared by the instructor. This new form helps to clarify the course review and selection process and also improves communication to our university, particularly those instructors who wish to have a course considered for the GEP. For example:

- Language was revised to distinguish between the GEP category objectives and the instructor’s student learning outcomes that were relevant to the GEP category.
- The committee’s preference for inclusion of a relevant assignment/example/prompt to better clarify the assessment/measure of an outcome has been made explicit in the form. This has been a common point of discussion for CUE in review of outcome measures sometimes resulting in an action being tabled until further information was obtained from the instructor.

- The new submission form provides guidance and structure that allows for more complete and clear responses and therefore should result in a more efficient time to approval.
- Questions that previously elicited only a “Yes/No” response were rewritten as open-ended. For example, the question “Does the course have no more than one pre-requisite?” has been changed to “List all course pre-requisites, co-requisites, and restrictive statements (ex: Jr standing; Chemistry majors only). If none, state none.” This allows CUE to collect more detailed information and better make decisions about the appropriateness of courses for the GEP.
- Notice of the new submission form will be communicated to the Colleges and posted on the CUE website.

Inventory of GEP courses. (Charge 6)

The subcommittee worked with Stephanie Dunstan in the Office of Assessment to collect data on the number of seats offered for each category of the GEP in recent semesters. The data showed that:

- In the 2013-2014 academic year, 121,946 seats were offered in 872 GEP courses; 93% of available seats were actually filled by students.
- Less than 5% of available seats were restricted.
- Roughly 18% of available seats were in 300- or 400-level courses.

Table 1 provides the breakdown of number of available seats by GEP Category.

Table 1: Number of Available Seats by GEP Category 2013-2014

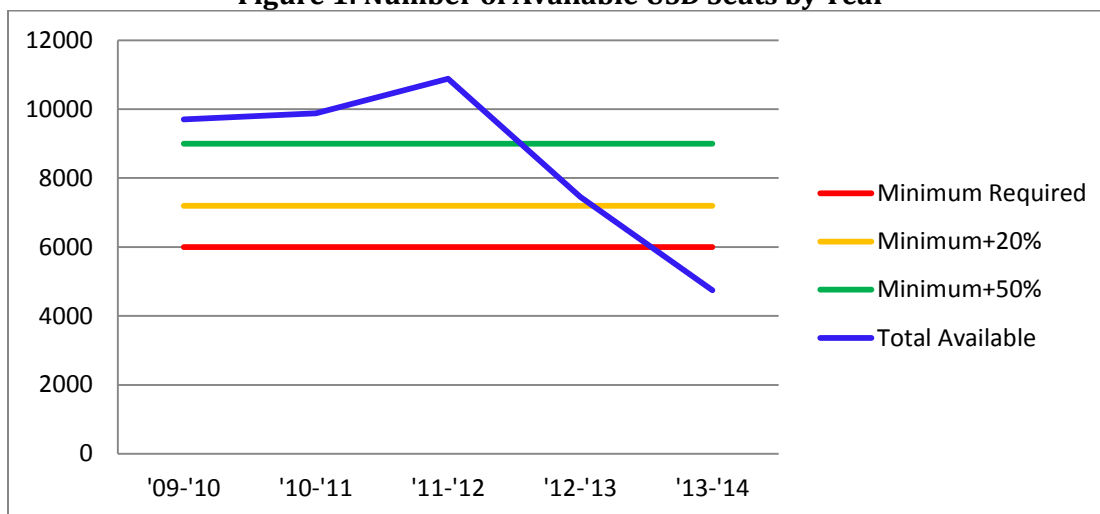
<u>GEP Categories</u>	Fall 2013	Spring 2014	Total
Natural Sciences	19,247	17,301	36,548
Social Sciences	10,674	9295	19,969
Mathematical Sciences	7828	5653	13,481
Humanities	6320	6801	13,121
Health and Exercise Studies	6421	5870	12,291
Global Knowledge	4277	4482	8759
Interdisciplinary Perspectives	4127	4270	8397
U.S. Diversity	3054	1692	4746
Visual and Performing Arts	2430	2204	4634
Total	64,378	57,568	121,946

Based on this data, the subcommittee concluded that the number of seats for most of the GEP categories appears to be adequate. A major exception to this, however, is the co-requisite of U.S. Diversity (USD). Further investigation revealed that the number of available seats for USD has in fact decreased since the 2011-2012 academic year and is currently at an all-time low (see Figure 1).

Need for additional seats in US Diversity. About one-fourth of the undergraduate population needs to take a course on the USD list each year; serving each of these students would require about 6,000 seats annually (based on current undergraduate enrollment of

about 24,000 students). However, this offers no room for scheduling conflicts and severely restricts students’ ability to select a course that looks interesting to them. More seats need to be offered to accommodate student preferences and ability to make timely progress toward graduation. Figure 1 shows three thresholds for the number of seats that should be offered in the USD category. The lowest is the “minimum” number of 6,000; the next two increase this number by 20% and 50%, respectively, to better provide for students. Note that during the most recent academic year, fewer than 5,000 seats were offered in this category.

Figure 1: Number of Available USD Seats by Year



Need for additional consideration of USD requirements. In addition to the clear lack of “ample” opportunities for students to fulfill the U.S. Diversity requirement, there is also the issue of “appropriate” opportunities. Since this requirement is a co-requisite without required credit hours, there are several 1-credit courses on the approved course list. This is a recurring point of discussion for CUE, both in the full committee and the subcommittee, with some members feeling very strongly that such courses cannot provide an appropriate level of academic rigor for students to truly consider issues of diversity. On the other hand, there are members of CUE who feel that the more “experiential” learning offered by such courses creates a unique opportunity for students to explore issues of diversity in a way that is more directly meaningful to their daily life and interactions. Recently, there have been recommendations from both the Faculty Senate and the Student Senate that the U.S. Diversity and Global Knowledge co-requisites be combined into a single requirement. One reason offered by the Student Senate for this recommendation is the perceived lack of seats in the USD category—a perception which is confirmed by the data presented above.

Need for additional consideration of upper division courses in the GEP. (*Charge 6*) While the data showed that only 18% of seats in the GEP are in upper division courses, the appropriateness of these courses as “general education” classes is also a recurring source of discussion for CUE. The new course submission form made two changes specifically

pertaining to this issue. First, instructors are required to list any discipline specific background or skills that a student is expected to have prior to taking a course at the 300 and 400 levels. CUE can use this information to better determine if course content is generally accessible to a majority of students or if it is really geared toward majors in a specific field. Second, for 400-level and/or dual-level courses, instructors are required to provide a complete syllabus and a statement on appropriateness of the course for the GEP. The appropriateness of upper division courses may also factor into the discussion of the U.S. Diversity co-requisite, as 27% of USD seats during the 2013-2014 academic year were in 300- or 400- level courses.

Summary and Recommendations.

The rubric subcommittee clarified several aspects of the course review process, and generally simplified this process for instructors. The subcommittee also reviewed data on of the number of seats available in GEP courses. Given the current lack of offerings for, and strong feelings surrounding, the U.S. Diversity category, this subcommittee recommends that a subsequent subcommittee be convened to continue with review of the US Diversity. The charge should be broadened to review the USD category with the goal of considering the current needs of the students and the university, bearing in mind both the recommendations of the original GEP Task Force and the perspective of representative from all colleges at NC State. In addition, it is recommended that this second subcommittee also complete Charge #4 regarding upper and lower division courses and specifically review other institutional models that describe the rational and define appropriate upper and lower division coursework for general education programs.

Specific questions for review by the subcommittee include:

1. What is the purpose of the U.S. Diversity GEP category?
2. Is it still appropriate for this category to be a co-requisite, rather than credit-bearing? If the US Diversity category/co-requisites were to be considered as credit-bearing, what impact would this have?
3. Should the US Diversity and Global Knowledge categories be combined into a single cultural diversity category?
4. What are the minimum expectations of a course in meeting the category objectives, i.e. contact hours/percentage of time devoted to US Diversity topics? Is this possible to measure consistently?
5. Can US Diversity be achieved through experiential/co-curricular workshops or other guided experience?
6. How do we incentivize faculty/departments to generate more US Diversity courses?