

General Education Review Task Force Report

January 19, 2006

I. Introduction

a. Brief history of GE at WMU

General Education has a long history at Western Michigan University (WMU) and elements of it have existed in the curriculum in one form or another since the beginning. However, the earliest discussions about a single General Education program required of all students regardless of major was initiated during the Sangren Administration in the late 1930s. A Committee on General Education was formed whose objective “was to develop a plan whereby the student would obtain a broad general background of knowledge which would make them conscious of the relationships of various fields and of the social implications of all knowledge” (Knauss 77). To this end, several interdisciplinary courses were designed, including “Foundation of Western Civilization,” “Introduction to Contemporary Society,” “Introduction to Physical Science,” and “Aesthetics.” These courses were made available to Freshmen and Sophomores, but were voluntary. In 1952, the administration made the General Education program a requirement of all students studying for a bachelor’s degree. Called “Basic Studies,” the program consisted of 38 credit hours and covered four areas (Communication and College Writing, Science, Social Science, and Electives). In 1954, the Division of Basic Studies was formed and a Director appointed.

A little over a decade later, the curriculum was restructured again, this time into three components: Freshman-Sophomore Level, Junior-Senior Level, and Electives. The number of credit hours increased to 40. Basic Studies was renamed General Studies and the Division of Basic Studies eventually became the School (1966) and then College (1970) of General Studies. General Education underwent another major modification in 1973: now students could fulfill the requirements either by taking the “Integrated Studies Program” offered by the College of General Studies or they could take the “Distribution Program” offered through the departments. The “Distribution Program” was an amplification of the earlier Basic Studies curriculum, now with five areas (Humanities and Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural Science and Mathematics, Non-Western World, and Electives). At this time, too, the number of credit hours was dropped from 40 to 35. In 1987, the departmentally based Distribution Program was designated the primary General Education Program at WMU, thus making the College of General Studies redundant. Its status was reduced to that of a department in 1992 and abolished altogether the following year

Several years before these changes occurred, the Provost had asked the Undergraduate Studies Council to review General Education in 1988. This eventually led to the creation of the Committee to Revise General Education, chaired by Faith Gabelnick, in 1990. Among other changes, the committee proposed a model called the University Education Program. It divided proficiencies from areas, and within the areas

proposed a “modified distribution program” with courses moving “from broad freshmen level introductory courses to junior-senior interdisciplinary, problem-oriented, capstone courses” (Smith 1990). The University Education Program was rejected by the Senate the next year. A new committee was convened, this time chaired by Arthur Falk. The new committee opted against a core emphasis in favor of the distribution model, arguing that it better served students in a “pluralistic, individualistic, and democratic society” (Falk 2). They also opted for a great deal of student choice within the distribution model since it “requires each student to seek *breadth* in knowledge and *versatility* in intellectual skills” (Falk 4, italics in original) as opposed to the specialization appropriate to the major. From the committee’s deliberations came the model and structure of the 40 credit-hour General Education Program in place today (more details below). This program was first implemented in Fall 1996 and has since been overseen by the Senate’s Committee to Oversee General Education, a sub-committee of the Undergraduate Studies Council.

b. GE and Higher Learning Commission Standards

The Higher Learning Commission, WMU’s accrediting body, makes it very clear the importance it places on general education, especially in the face of increased pressure to “vocationize” higher education:

An organization of higher learning, while sharing the same commitment to providing education that is relevant and practical, has a broader perspective on what it means to be an educated person. That is, although it sees a student as a potential skilled employee, it values even more helping that student become an independently creative person, and informed and dependable citizen, and a socially aware and responsible individual. (*The Handbook of Accreditation*, 3.2-12)

So important is the role of general education that the Commission has embedded it as a Core Component in its Criteria for Accreditation (3.2-13) and published a separate statement reaffirming its value (3.4-3). According to the Criteria, general education programs must “impart common knowledge and intellectual concepts” so that “a student acquires a breadth of knowledge in the areas and proficiency in the skills that the organization identifies as hallmarks of being college education.” Each institution of higher learning must therefore demonstrate “its commitment to the centrality of general education by including an appropriate component of general education in all undergraduate programs,” and such programs must be “valued and owned” by the institution, overseen by the faculty, and regularly assessed “against the organization’s stated goals for student learning” (3.4-3). Finally, the Commission states that general education programs should be designed to address such vital questions as diversity, globalization, and multiculturalism, while promoting life-long learning and the socially responsible application of knowledge. The message is clear: those institutions that do not take general education seriously will jeopardize their accreditation.

c. Provost’s Charges to GERT

Given the importance of General Education for WMU’s accreditation, and given the fact that WMU’s program has not been reviewed since 1996, Provost Delene, in

consultation with the Executive Board of the Faculty Senate, convened the General Education Review Taskforce (GERT) on June 14, 2005. The Provost's charges to GERT are as follows:

1. What findings from the preliminary assessment of General Education suggest change, and what should those changes be?
2. From those initial assessment findings, can you determine whether the current General Education Program helps create the attitudes and skills requisite for a life of learning in a diverse society?
3. Would a different General Education model serve the University equally as well or better in the near future?
4. Are the eight areas currently found within the General Education program necessary?
5. Is the total number of required credit hours in the General Education program typical of public institutions or not? If not, what is the recommended number of credit hours for the program?
6. What is the annual instructional cost for each General Education area, and the total annual instructional cost for the General Education program?

The Provost indicated at the initial meeting of this committee that its purpose was simply the improvement of the General Education program. Moreover, this committee would represent the beginning of a regular cycle of assessment of General Education at WMU. The committee membership is presented in Appendix 1.

II. Status of GE at WMU

To address the Provost's charges in a systematic fashion, the committee decided to divide them into three categories: charges dealing with the structure of the General Education program (3, 4, 5), charges dealing with assessment (1, 2), and the charge (6) dealing with the economics of General Education at WMU. We will then identify areas for improvement and make proposals for the achievement of these improvements.

a. The Size and Structure of WMU's GE Program

i. Size

The General Education program at WMU consists of 4 Proficiencies (College-Level Writing, Baccalaureate Writing, College-Level Mathematics or Quantitative Reasoning, and Enhance or Develop a Proficiency) and 8 Distribution Areas (Fine Arts, Humanities, The United States: Cultures and Issues, Other Cultures and Civilizations, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural Science with Laboratory, Natural Science and Technology: Applications and Implications, and Health and Well-Being). The program requires students to take 40 credit hours or 33% of the 122 credit hours required for graduation. Students have 432 general education courses to choose from, with an average of 90% Proficiencies and 77% Distribution Area courses offered each Fall and Spring

semester. An average of 30% of the Proficiency courses and an average of 20% of the Distribution Area courses enroll less than 75% of capacity during Fall and Spring semesters (see Figure 1). In other words, there is great student demand for the vast majority of General Education courses at WMU.

Figure 1
All University General Education Statistics

	<i>Proficiencies</i>				
	F '03	S '04	F '04	S '05	F '05
# Listed Prof. (172 Total)	151	153	152	158	161
# Sections	664	587	660	588	547
% Avail. Listed Prof.	88%	89%	88%	92%	94%
Underenrolled (<75% Capacity)	31%	35%	22%	37%	29%

	<i>General Education Areas</i>				
	F '03	S '04	F '04	S '05	F '05
# Listed Areas (260 Total)	221	198	199	184	201
# Sections	543	478	509	464	470
% Avail. Areas	85%	76%	77%	71%	77%
Underenrolled (<75% Capacity)	11%	21%	19%	28%	20%

Statistics supplied by Mark Liberacki, Technology Coordinator for the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences (9/29/2005).

The committee did a comparison of WMU's General Education program with those at the following local peer institutions: Central Michigan University, Grand Valley State University, Michigan State University, Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, Bowling Green State University, and Ball State University. Compared with these programs, WMU's General Education program is a bit below average in terms of the number of credit hours required and the percentage of total graduation credit hours

(see Figure 2). Almost all GE programs cluster around 42 credit hours or about 35% of total credit hours required for graduation. The two anomalies are Wayne State on the high end (51 credit hours or 43% of credit hours for graduation) and Bowling Green State University at the low end (27 credit hours or 22% of credit hours necessary for graduation). It should be mentioned that at Bowling Green, majors in College of Arts and Sciences are required to supplement their General Education courses with a substantial Arts and Sciences General Education requirement (somewhat equivalent to WMU's College of Arts and Sciences LEC requirement).

Figure 2
General Education Program Comparison

	WMU	CMU	GVU	MSU	EMU	WAYNE	BGSU	BSU
# UG	23,156	19,934	18,393	35,408	19,000	20,712	17,300	17,708
GE CH REQ	40	42	48	39	48	51	27 [†]	41
TOTAL CH	122	124	120	120	124	120	122	126
GE%	33%	34%	40%	33%	39%	43%	22%	33%
#GECOURSE	432	200	289	44	215	296	216	67

[†]Supplemented by a substantial A&S-Based General Education Program.

WMU stands out from its peer institutions by the sheer number of General Education courses—432—on the books. However, one of the problems with the 432 number is that it includes the upper-level baccalaureate-level writing courses in every department, something not found at other institutions. It also includes every foreign language course taught at Western since any foreign language course will meet the foreign language proficiency requirement, even though very little enrollment in upper-level foreign languages is really part of General Education. There is a similar problem for all of the math courses taken by scientists, engineers, and business students. In order to satisfy major requirements, these students take more math courses necessary to satisfy the math proficiency, but these courses are counted as part of the proficiency nevertheless. Undoubtedly, if these courses could somehow be excluded, the number of General Education courses in WMU's program would come into line with the average, although this would obviously put greater enrollment pressure on those courses remaining and make it even more difficult for students to fulfill their GEs in a timely fashion.

ii. Structure

In terms of the structure of General Education programs, the committee cast a wider net. In addition to our local peer institutions, we also compared WMU to Indiana State University, Arizona State University, North Carolina State University, Penn State University, University of Missouri-Columbia, Eastern New Mexico University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Miami University of Ohio. We found that most General Education programs are structured with a set of Proficiencies (written and oral communication, critical reasoning, quantitative reasoning) and a series of Areas (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences) much like WMU. Most GE Programs have separate cultures requirements (foreign cultures, U.S. culture), while only a few

universities have separate Science, Technology, and Values area (e.g. North Carolina State). Only about a third of the programs reviewed have physical education requirements and computer literacy requirements. Two programs explicitly address the integration of knowledge gained through General Education (e.g. Grand Valley State University [“Thematic Clusters”] and Indiana State University [Capstone Seminar in all majors designed to integrate General Education]). One program has built freshman seminars into the General Education curriculum (Miami of Ohio). All the General Education programs reviewed have substantial web presences, with clearly stated mission statements, rationale, and assessment goals (e.g. Bowling Green), and some universities have a director and an office of General Education (e.g. Miami of Ohio, Case Western Reserve University).

In our survey of local peer institutions, the committee did find two universities that have opted for a radically different model of General Education: Ball State University and Michigan State University. Both have decided to teach large sections with a limited cadre of faculty with a rigorously limited set of courses (Ball State has 67 General Education courses, while MSU has only 44). In other words, Ball State and MSU have adopted a compact core model of General Education instead of the more typical distribution model found at most universities. Little evaluative information was available for Ball State’s program, but in the case of Michigan State, the move to a core has led to a program that is, in words its director, Ken Walzer, “a cash cow” for participating colleges (Walzer 10). However, Walzer also states that it has also led to a program in which faculty are reluctant to participate because it is isolated from the curricula of the disciplines; a program in which “classes are too large to underwrite truly active and interactive learning or to assign significant writing” (9); and a program about which students and parents are largely apathetic. Moreover, the defining virtue of the MSU program, its rigorous integration, has been hard to achieve because it is “a challenge to create and sustain a community of interaction among integrative studies faculty” (Walzer 8). Obviously, it would be too precipitous to condemn the core model based solely on this example, but MSU’s program should serve as a caution that quality can easily be sacrificed in the heedless pursuit of efficiency and integration.

b. The Preliminary Assessment Data on General Education¹

In 2003, then Provost Elise Jorgens convened the General Education Assessment Committee with a mandate to develop, implement, and monitor the assessment of General Education at WMU. The committee’s first task was to recommend an initial assessment plan, and to this end the committee formulated student learning outcomes for each of the eight distribution areas, based on the goals established in the General Education Policy adopted in 1996. Learning outcomes were finalized after soliciting feedback from faculty teaching in each of the areas. The committee also decided that specific area content would be assessed locally using a general template that allowed flexibility for assessment in each of the eight distribution areas. In the fall semester of 2003, faculty who taught courses in General Education Distribution Areas I and II each

¹ Most of the information for this section was taken from Paulius and Dupuis 2006.

submitted five to ten samples of student work, which were subsequently assessed and the findings documented. Faculty were also asked to determine the percentage of students in each class who achieved the specific learning outcomes for each of the three categories “good,” “adequate,” and “weak.” The process was repeated for Areas III and IV in the spring semester of 2004, for Areas V and VI in the fall of 2004, and for Areas VII and VIII in the spring semester of 2005. Figure 3 summarizes the result of this exercise (N = number of instructors participating [number of courses]):

Figure 3
Assessment of Specific Area Content

Area	Good	Adequate	Weak	N
I FINE ARTS	57%	29%	15%	11 [?]
II HUMANITIES	42%	41%	17%	22 [19]
III US CULTURES	51%	33%	17%	? [16]
IV OTHER CULTURES	44%	35%	23%	? [8]
V SOC/BEHAV. SCI.	49%	36%	16%	? [26]
VI NAT. SCI. W/LAB	48%	32%	21%	14 [?]
VII NAT. SCI. APP/IMP	61%	26%	13%	8 [7]
VIII HEALTH & WELL	82%	17%	1%	7 [4]
Overall Average	55%	32%	16%	

Data Source: Paulius and Dupuis 2005.

The preliminary assessment of General Education Areas yielded useful results. First, it allowed a tentative set of learning outcomes to be tested in a classroom setting where the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches were made obvious. This will result in the improvement and streamlining of subsequent sets of learning outcomes. Second, the data provide a baseline against which subsequent iterations of General Education Assessment can be compared. And third, the data reveal that, for the most part, the General Education Areas are doing what we say they are doing. Undoubtedly, in each of the Areas (with the possible exception of Area VIII), ‘Good’ scores can be increased (in some cases markedly), but the overall combined score of 87% demonstrates that students are benefiting from each Area. What does need substantial improvement is the rate of participation by faculty in the assessment process. In each of the Areas, only a small percentage of classes were assessed, and only a tiny fraction of the faculty were involved.

The General Education Assessment Committee was also mandated to do preliminary assessment of the proficiencies. After reviewing several options, the committee chose to administer the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBase) to freshmen in the fall semester, 2003, and the same exam to seniors in the spring semester, 2004. In order to compare two selected instruments, the committee then administered the California Critical Thinking Skills Test to freshmen in the fall semester, 2004, and to seniors in the spring semester, 2005. The California Critical Thinking Skills

Test showed that the skills tested by the exam improved for seniors (18.60, n = 549) relative to freshmen (15.01, n = 577). As a whole, the average for the two together (16.76) was very similar to the national average (16.90), with the difference being statistically insignificant. According to this very preliminary measure, therefore, WMU's proficiencies are doing an adequate job in teaching critical thinking skills.

In terms of the CBase examination, the composite score for WMU freshmen was 273 (n = 579), which placed them in the 52 percentile of freshmen nationally and below the comparison group's freshmen composite score of 285. Compared to the national sample, scores in English (41%) and Social Sciences (42%) were below the median while Math (59%) and Science (60%) were above. Freshmen scores in each of the four areas were below those of WMU's peer institutions. Importantly, however, scores for WMU seniors (n = 558) improved in the three areas tested (English, math and science) compared to the freshmen class. The score in science was equal to that of the seniors in the peer-institution comparison group and in the 69% of seniors nationally. The score in math was higher than in the peer institution group and in the 73% nationally. A composite score was not available because the social science portion was not administered, and the score in English was based on incomplete exams. Again, although incomplete, the preliminary data from the CBase examination seems to suggest that WMU's proficiencies are doing a good job in achieving their stated learning outcomes.

i. FSSE, NSSE, and General Education at WMU

At the July 15th meeting of GERT, Dr. Susan Caulfield (Sociology) presented results from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSEE), which was administered in 2004 on the WMU campus. The survey closely mirrors the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which was completed in 2003. The survey collected data on faculty perspectives regarding student engagement on campus. Results for WMU were compared to other doctoral research universities (DRUs), and indicated that faculty perceived that WMU placed more emphasis on active learning in classrooms than other DRUs, but felt that WMU placed less emphasis on foreign language, engaging in discussion among diverse groups, and on acquiring a broad general education (Caulfield 18, 21, 23). When comparing faculty and student perceptions, however, there appears to be a general disconnect between groups on these three areas: both freshmen and seniors in the NSSE survey reported that they perceived that WMU put a greater emphasis on acquiring a broad general education and on engaging in discussion among diverse groups, and much less on studying a foreign language (Delene and Loizides 9, 15, 21).

c. Economics of GE at WMU

At the September 8, 2005 meeting of GERT, James Gilchrist, Director of the Office of Institutional Research, presented an overview of the financing of General Education at WMU. He began by noting how difficult it is to get precise figures. First, it is difficult to determine when a class is functioning as an elective, a GE course, or a course for a major/minor. Second, it is difficult to determine salary and fringe costs for faculty, costs of Part Timers to fill gaps left by faculty teaching GEs, the true costs of

TAs, and overhead costs. Because of this, the Office of Institutional Research calculated only a rough estimate of GE costs. This was done by dividing the estimated expenditure in faculty salaries and fringes for all the GE courses in a given Proficiency or Area by total student credit hours generated by that Proficiency or Area, thus yielding the estimated cost per student credit hour in each Proficiency and Area. The overall results of this process are presented in Appendix II.

The committee discussed some of the implications of these figures. Gilchrist accounted for some of the variation in costs per SCH between Proficiencies and Areas. Higher costs are associated with small class size, which is due either to pedagogical reasons (e.g. Area I: Fine Arts) or because of a higher proportion of upper-division courses (e.g. Area IV: Other Cultures). Lower costs are associated with large class sizes and, in some cases, class fees (e.g. Area VI: Natural Science with Lab). Gilchrist stressed that while the costs are estimates only, they do show the relative distribution of resources between Proficiencies and Areas. This might be useful if the committee were to engage in future discussions about adding or subtracting GE requirements that would allow for the redistribution of resources. However, as to delivering the present GE program more cost effectively, it appears this could be achieved primarily by offering more very large classes. This is an approach that is not only logistically difficult given present limitations on classroom space, but is pedagogically dubious and likely to lead to even lower levels of student satisfaction and retention.

d. GERT Committee's Response to the Provost's Charges

In light of the foregoing, the committee makes the following observations and recommendations in response to the Provost's charges.

1. What findings from the preliminary assessment of General Education suggest change, and what should those changes be?

While the preliminary general education assessment data are promising, it is the opinion of this Committee that it is too early to use them to make substantive changes. At best, the preliminary data are a baseline against which future data can be judged, and it will take several years of data collection before we can make responsible recommendations in this regard. Moreover, we still need to hone existing assessment instruments and experiment with new ones, especially the standardized tests used to assess the Proficiencies. General Education assessment also needs to be more highly coordinated, more faculty need to be brought into the process, and a mechanism for implementing changes indicated by assessment needs to be put into place (see recommendations below). Finally, it is the opinion of this Committee that substantive changes to the General Education Program should not be based on assessment data alone.

2. From those initial assessment findings, can you determine whether the current General Education Program helps create the attitudes and skills requisite for a life of learning in a diverse society?

No. The University Assessment Committee did not address these specific issues and it is the opinion of members of the Committee that the current assessment regime is

not adequate to make such a determination. Such an assessment regime could be designed, and it should include not only current students, but alumni as well (see recommendations below).

3. Would a different General Education model serve the University equally as well or better in the near future?

No. It is the opinion of this Committee that the members of the 1990 Committee to Revise General Education and its immediate successor did their job extremely well. WMU has been well served by the current model, and it accords well with those in use at most of our peer institutions, both in terms of the number of required credit hours and its structure of Proficiencies and Areas. This does not mean, of course, that the Program could not be improved. Below, we identify four areas in needs of improvement (accessibility, assessment, integration, coordination).

4. Are the eight areas currently found within the General Education program necessary?

Yes. Intellectually, we find all 8 areas defensible within a sound program of General Education. The Areas can be improved, specifically by integrating information literacy, eliminating course bottlenecks, and by weeding out courses that do not meet the General Education goals as measured through assessment (see recommendations below).

5. Is the total number of required credit hours in the General Education program typical of public institutions or not? If not, what is the recommended number of credit hours for the program?

The 40 credit-hour requirement is average for our peer institutions and in line with the expectations of the Higher Learning Commission, WMU's accrediting body. Therefore, we do not recommend reducing the credit-hour requirement based on this. The possibility of eliminating Proficiency 4 (Develop or Enhance a Proficiency) might be explored since in some Colleges (e.g. Arts and Sciences), the choice of courses in this particular Proficiency is dictated by the College. However, the impact on all Colleges would have to be carefully evaluated before this was considered.

6. What is the annual instructional cost for each General Education area, and the total annual instructional cost for the General Education program?

These figures appear in Appendix II. A general discussion of the cost of General Education can be found above (II. c.). To reiterate the conclusion reached there, it appears that greater cost effectiveness could only be achieved by offering more very large classes.

III. Recommendations for the Improvement of the Present GE Program

a. Accessibility: The committee identified five specific areas in which the accessibility of General Education courses could be significantly improved.

i. Area VIII: Health and Wellness: Area VIII has routinely been identified by College advisors as a bottleneck in General Education. Since nearly 50% of the enrollment in this Area is in HPER, Deb Berkey, chair of HPER, was invited to address this issue at the November 19th meeting of GERT. Seats in HPER GE courses actually went unfilled last year, so the bottleneck must be attributed to the structure of the courses, not to a lack of seats. HPER's GE courses consist of a large lecture course (HPER 111, 1,000 seats); a lab section (45 seats) which deals with lifestyle and health issues; and an activities component (HPER 170-84, 15 to 20 seats) to put into practice what is learned in lecture and lab. It is for this reason that lecture and lab are linked—a practice the Committee found pedagogically sound. However, Berkey acknowledged the difficulty some students may have in fitting this three-day-a-week structure into their schedules, especially if they are taking courses away from the main campus. Therefore, Berkey committed HPER to running activities sections on other campuses and at more convenient times in order to increase student accessibility. Also, she said would be willing to set aside a certain number of seats for freshmen or in scheduling patterns that would be of benefit to certain colleges and programs. Finally, HPER would also explore the possibility of offering the activity portion in a concentrated block of time at the end of a semester and/or more summer sections. Each of these recommendations is supported by the Committee. Berkey stressed that she would like better communication with College advisors and that she was happy to work with advisors to facilitate students' fulfillment of Area VIII requirements. Such coordination would be facilitated greatly by the appointment of an over-all coordinator of General Education (see d. below).

ii. Math 110: Math 110 had been identified as a bottleneck in General Education. According to Jim Gilchrist, the failure rate is too high and the course inappropriately difficult for a GE course. Terrell Hodge, chair of the Math Department, and Radu Teodorescu, Modular Math Coordinator, were invited to the November 19th meeting to address this issue. Math 110 is part of a three-course sequence: Math 110, 111, 114. According to data provided by Hodge and Teodorescu, failure rates for Math 110 are significantly higher than for 111 and 114. Despite this, Teodorescu defended the course on several grounds: (1) Math 110 has to serve at least three different constituencies: GE students, students who need it for their professional programs, and Math majors; (2) the content of Math 110 is not more difficult than senior-level math courses in High School; and (3) much of the failure rate for Math 110 is due to students (primarily freshmen) not showing up to take the exams (the exams are computer-based and students have the option of taking them at several different times). The Committee asked whether it would be possible for the Math Department to design a course that would better serve GE students while still being rigorous academically. Hodge responded that the Department had already been thinking along these lines several years back and had designed a new program to meet these needs. However, a change in policy in the College of Arts and Sciences away from supporting "remedial" programs led to dropping the new program since it would require additional staffing (both faculty and graduate students). Despite this, in light of the persistent bottleneck created by the present Math 110, the Committee recommends that this new Math program for General Education students be reconsidered and that the Math Department be furnished with the resources necessary to implement it.

iii. Transfers and GE requirements: The committee recognizes the difficulty transfer students often have in meeting WMU's GE requirements with courses transferred from other colleges and universities. In light of this, the committee recommends improving flexibility where appropriate to provide transfer students a seamless transition into our General Education program. Such flexibility could include, e.g., allowing the use of transferred upper-division courses to substitute for lower-division GE courses at WMU; allowing College advisors to accept transfer courses that clearly fall within the eight distribution areas but for which no equivalent course exists at WMU; allowing Area VIII requirements to be met through participation in active military service in one of the US military services; allowing students who have a Bachelor's degree from an accredited US institution, who are seeking a second Bachelor's degree, to meet all WMU General Education requirements.

iv. Major switchers and GE requirements: Undergraduates switching majors even late into their college careers has become a fact of life at WMU. By allowing such students to apply upper-division courses taken for their previous major to count as GE courses in the appropriate areas, degree completion could be facilitated.

v. Web-based GE courses: Given students' extremely tight school and work schedules, the availability of more web-based GE courses could significantly streamline students' progress through the GE program. The committee therefore recommends expanding web-based GE offerings by creating incentives for faculty to create and administer such courses.

b. Assessment: Recognizing the importance of assessment for the continual improvement of General Education at Western, the committee recommends the following steps to strengthen our current assessment practices:

i. Improve assessment tools: The assessment of the general education program is still in the developmental stage. We recommend that work on improving the reliability and relevance of the assessment tools continue, with special attention paid to securing better instruments for the assessment of the Proficiencies. Again, it is the opinion of this committee that significant changes to the General Education program should not be made until we have reliable assessment data to make informed decisions.

ii. Expand assessment: The committee recommends expanding assessment to alumni. Concrete evidence generated by assessing the impact of General Education on our graduates later in their careers will allow us to more finely tune our GE offerings, but will also serve to demonstrate the importance of General Education to incoming students.

iii. Faculty awareness: Increased faculty awareness and participation in the assessment process is an essential component in ensuring the quality and continued improvement of the General Education program. Responsibility for generating this

awareness should lie with the General Education Coordinator (see recommendation d below).

iv. COGE and assessment: The Committee on General Education needs to play a key role in ensuring that the General Education goals and objectives are consistently met across areas and proficiencies. To ensure that appropriate changes are implemented as a result of the assessment process, we recommend that COGE make the assessment of learning outcomes part of the re-approval process for individual courses for General Education areas or proficiencies. To this end, the committee also recommends that COGE begin a comprehensive review of the goals and objectives of each of the General Education areas or proficiencies, perhaps beginning as soon as Spring semester, 2006.

c. Integration: Each piece of General Education contributes to a unique and valuable whole. Our program can improve with a greater integration of General Education, both within the program and with other aspects of student majors/minors. Students and faculty across campus can benefit from greater efforts to connect knowledge banks and modes of learning as they move among Areas and between General Education and studies in their majors. Social implications, history, cultural contexts, and modes of inquiry are just some of the concerns to be found in any Area or major. The committee tentatively explored four potential avenues for integration and recommends continued exploration of each:

i. Connecting General Education and the First-year Experience: General Education—its history, goals, functions, and requirements—could be a part of the curriculum in the FYE, so that students begin their experience at WMU with an appreciation of General Education that makes it more than a series of mysterious requirements. The FYE program itself could perhaps be layered onto some General Education courses that are likely to be taken by first-year students. FYE sections could be small groups drawn from large lecture classes or FYE sections could be attached to Proficiency 1 courses.

ii. Capstone seminars: If one of the goals of General Education is to promote life-long learning, then a capstone course seems a good bridge between learning before and after graduation. Such courses could be built around central questions that bridge disciplines and methodologies; students would bring unique combinations of courses to these seminars. The committee does not see these courses as additional requirements, but instead as an added possibility for some existing courses.

iii. Thematic clusters: The committee was intrigued by clusters of courses similar to those offered at Grand Valley University. The size and scope of WMU and its existing General Education program suggest that a complete overhaul to clusters would be unwieldy. However, identifying pairs or trios of General Education classes that are complementary can encourage faculty teamwork, greater student retention of material (as it returns in a complementary class), and greater curricular coherence. If clusters were

identified, some existing courses might be tweaked and scheduling could facilitate clustering.

iv. Integrating Information Literacy into General Education: From Elaine Jayne, the committee learned that Information Literacy is the “ability to develop effective search strategies, locate and retrieve information sources, analyze and critically evaluate information, organize and synthesize information, and use it effectively—including ethical issues embedded in all these acts.” Minimally, goals for information literacy should be articulated within the goals for general education. A richer discussion is also necessary about where to incorporate overt discussions of information literacy within General Education. Again, the committee is not recommending an additional course requirement, but is seeking ways to work within existing structures.

d. Coordination: Currently, there is no individual or committee charged with the advocacy of the GE program on a day-to-day basis. Unlike many of our peer institutions, WMU’s GE program has no director, no mission statement or web presence. Instead, GE issues are now addressed by several committees and task forces, which are largely independent of one another. The Council to Oversee General Education (COGE) approves new GE courses and regularly reviews all general education courses, but does not take responsibility for assessment of learning outcomes or enrollment management. Departments have assumed responsibility for managing enrollment in GE courses, which has made it difficult to evaluate or control GE efficiency and effectiveness at the institutional level. The General Education Assessment Committee, which conducted a preliminary assessment of GE learning outcomes in 2003-2005, has been dissolved. The General Education Review Task Force is presently assessing the structure of GE, but will complete its work upon submission of this report. The committee believes that the absence of consistent, centralized coordination of GE has led to many of the previously discussed issues relating to integration of GE courses across the program, accessibility for students, and assessment of GE learning outcomes.

The committee recommends that the University create a faculty-ranked position of Director of General Education, reporting to the Provost. The director’s primary goal would be the advocacy of GE across the institution. The director’s responsibilities would include day-to day oversight of issues relating to integration, accessibility and assessment, and to continual improvement of the GE program. The director would be charged with such tasks as building awareness of GE among students, faculty, and other institutional stakeholders, integrating GE into University and College mission statements, and developing and maintaining a GE web presence. The director would be responsible for supervising GE orientation of new students and new faculty, monitoring GE course offerings, enrollment and resource needs, and facilitating issues related to GE for transfer students, ‘major switchers’ and upper division courses. The director, in consultation with COGE, would work with faculty to assess GE course offerings, to develop thematic clusters and capstone seminars, and to integrate information literacy into Freshman Experience Program and Baccalaureate Writing Courses. The director would also be responsible for developing and administering an ongoing, regular program of assessment of GE learning outcomes.

While the committee recognizes that creating a new position may conflict with current economic realities, we believe that consistent, centralized coordination of the program is essential in order to increase the value of GE at WMU. The committee believes that the creation of this position is a necessary step toward improvement of the GE program, and will demonstrate the University's commitment to GE.

IV. Bibliography

- Anon. 1996. "Western Michigan University Education Policy (February 6, 1994)."
- Caulfield, Susan L. 2005. "FSSE 2004 Report: Western Michigan University (June 29, 2005)."
- Delene, Linda M. and Georgios Loizides. 1993. "Western Michigan University's First Year Participation Report (February 24, 2003)."
- Falk, Arthur. 1993. "Comments to the Senate on the General Education Policy (3/22/93)."
- Knauss, James O. 1953. *The First Fifty Years: A History of Western Michigan College of Education, 1903-1953*. Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan College of Education.
- Paulius, L. and M. Dupuis. 2006. "General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC) Final Report (www.wmich.edu/poapa/GEA/).
- Walzer, Ken. 2000. "Liberal General Education at Michigan State University Integrative Studies." Unpublished paper presented at meeting of the Councils of Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Toronto, Canada, November 9, 2000 (realizingthevision.msu.edu/integrative_studies/documents/GeneralEducationModels_000.doc).

Appendix I

GERT Committee Membership

	<i>Department</i>	<i>College</i>
Brian Wilson, Chair	Comparative Religion	Arts and Sciences
Barbara Frazier	Family and Consumer Sciences	Education
Jim Gilchrist	Provost's Office	
Diane Hamilton	Bronson School of Nursing	Health and Human Services
Margaret Hamilton	Academic Advisor	Fine Arts
Richard Hathaway	Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering	Engineering and Applied Sciences
Georgina Hill	English	Arts and Sciences
Elizabeth Hoger	Business Information Systems	Haworth College of Business
Richard Keaveny	Art	Fine Arts
Lisa Paulius	Physics	Arts and Sciences
Gil Sinclair	Aviation Sciences	Aviation

Appendix II
Estimated Expenditure for General Education Courses
by Area/Proficiency
2003-2004

Distribution Area I	Fine Arts	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		28,104	\$4,143,156.90	\$147.42
Distribution Area II	Humanities	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		28,187	\$2,740,936.32	\$97.24
Distribution Area III	The United States: Cultures and Issues	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		25,512	\$2,666,209.98	\$104.51
Distribution Area IV	Other Cultures	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		21,315	\$2,374,594.45	\$111.40
Distribution Area V	Social and Behavioral Sciences	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		48,261	\$3,649,904.61	\$75.63
Distribution Area VI	Natural Science with Lab	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		27,131	\$2,058,759.65	\$75.88

Distribution Area VII	Natural Science and Technology: Applications and	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		19,693	\$2,123,582.90	\$107.83
Distribution Area VIII	Health and Well-being	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		11,940	\$818,038.68	\$68.51
Proficiency 1	College-Level Writing	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		15,288	\$1,748,279.02	\$114.36
Proficiency 3	College-Level Mathematics or Quantitative	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		16,241	\$1,636,896.64	\$100.79
Proficiency 4a	Advanced Writing	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		798	\$94,724.49	\$118.70
Proficiency 4b	Mathematics or Quantitative Reasoning	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		12,895	\$1,275,667.46	\$98.93
Proficiency 4c	Critical Thinking	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		4,891	\$331,649.78	\$67.81

Proficiency 4d	Oral Communications	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		7,074	\$521,649.14	\$73.74
Proficiency 4f	Computer Science	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		1,524	\$114,494.31	\$75.13
Proficiency 4g	Foreign Languages	SCH	Estimated Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		16,913	\$2,286,611.16	\$135.20
Grand Total		Total SCH	Total Expenditure	Cost per SCH
		285,767	\$28,585,155.49	\$100.03

Student Academic and Institutional Research
Thursday, July 07, 2005