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General Education Review Task Force Working Proposal as of December 6, 2006

Overview

The General Education Review Task Force (GERTF) has been meeting for the past two years to review the “entire GER, including purpose, structure, function, and assessment” (from the charge letter). Earlier this fall, the GERTF presented a proposal to the NCSU community, including the Faculty Senate, several standing committees, and the colleges; the Task Force considered the responses and is now ready to present this modified proposal to the campus.

In many ways, this proposal is very similar to the current General Education Requirements (GER) in place at NCSU but with fewer required hours. However, this proposal would provide a great deal more flexibility to both academic programs and to students. Furthermore, this proposal, if accepted, would provide a General Education Program that could evolve over time. For instance, the First Year Course and the GE Capstone course, prominent features of the initial proposal from the GERTF, are absent from this proposal but the Interdisciplinary Perspectives category allows colleges the opportunity to pilot such courses. In fact, the Task Force recommends that colleges be given the resources to pilot, evaluate and assess these types of courses, and if found to be advantageous for our students introduced more widely at some future date.

The thematic tracks of the initial proposal have been retained but made entirely optional for students. The Task Force is of the opinion that these tracks will provide more coherence to the general education program and therefore recommend that resources be made available to faculty to develop them. Again, flexibility is a major advantage, as students may choose not to participate in a thematic track, or they may participate in a thematic track and double-count the courses towards a minor. However, the thematic tracks are not intended to compete with existing or future minors.

The basic structure of the proposal is similar to what is currently in place. The Task Force recommends that the current category objectives, those broad statements of student learning that guide CUE in approving new courses for the lists, remain essentially the same if this proposal is accepted. However, the faculty should be invited to revisit the category objectives in the near future as part of an ongoing discussion about general education.

Proposal

Principal Structure

English 101	4
Humanities*	6
Social Sciences*	6
Mathematical Sciences**	6
Natural Sciences***	7
Additional Breadth****	3

PE/Healthy Living	2
Interdisciplinary Perspectives****	5-6

Total: 39-40 hours

*From two different disciplines.

**At least one must have an MA or ST prefix.

***Including at least one laboratory.

****Students will take a course outside of their major area – students in disciplines that are primarily focused on science, mathematics, engineering, or technology will take an additional course in Humanities, Social Sciences, or Visual and Performing Arts; students in disciplines that are primarily focused on the Humanities or Social Sciences will take an additional course in Mathematical or Natural Sciences. As many programs do not neatly fall into one or the other of these categories, programs will make the determination as to which courses will satisfy the Additional Breadth requirement for their majors.

*****Interdisciplinary courses that integrate content across the disciplines and teach students to view issues from multiple perspectives. At least one course must include content from both humanities/social sciences and mathematics/natural science/engineering/technology disciplines. At least initially, many STS courses would satisfy part of this requirement. The Task Force encourages all colleges to develop and pilot these courses (or to modify existing courses so that they meet these objectives). The Task Force particularly recommends that these courses be directed toward freshmen, to introduce them to the general education program and to help them make those connections across the disciplines that are vital for educated persons in our world.

Co-Requisites

U. S. Diversity (1 course, 0 additional hours): This requirement could be met with coursework that focuses on the interrelationship of individuals, racial groups, and cultural groups to understand and appreciate issues of diversity, equality, and structured inequality in the U.S., its institutions, and its cultures.

Global Knowledge (1 course, 0 additional hours): This requirement could be met through a study abroad experience (with guidelines to be developed) or coursework that focuses on human expression in different cultures, how other cultural traditions have influenced American culture and society, and how cultures in general develop distinctive features and interact with other cultures.

These co-requisite requirements would only serve to introduce students to these issues and NCSU strongly recommends that academic program faculty carefully consider how they may weave these themes throughout their curricula. Many programs already do this quite successfully and could serve as models for others.

Advanced Communication

Because effective communication is central to productive engagement in academic, professional, and civic communities, NCSU requires all freshmen to

pass English 101. While this course is extremely important and valuable to all students, regardless of major, no single course can by itself prepare students to be effective communicators in their professional, personal, and civic lives. Therefore, NCSU recommends that all academic programs carefully consider how they may most effectively structure their curricula so that every graduate of NCSU has developed writing and speaking skills appropriate for today and tomorrow.

Foreign Language Proficiency

This requirement may be met by 2 years of C or better in high school foreign language courses or successful completion of FL* 102.

Thematic Tracks

Students will have the option of completing the General Education Program through a thematic track. Under this option, students choose 4 courses (12 hours) from the approved lists that address a single theme or issue from multiple disciplinary perspectives, with at least one course from either the Mathematics or Natural Sciences lists and at least one course from either the Humanities or Social Sciences lists. The Task Force envisions three options for students: they may choose not to pursue a thematic track; they may pursue a thematic track that has been developed by faculty members and approved by CUE (and thereby receive a transcript notation to that effect); or they may, in effect, create their own thematic track in consultation with their adviser (but will not receive a transcript notation). If there is sufficient interest in student developed tracks, the Task Force recommends that a formal process be instituted whereby students could create such tracks and thereby receive transcript notation.

This option allows students to connect knowledge from different disciplinary areas through the focus on a single theme or issue. It is well suited for students who have a well defined interest in a particular topic and who would benefit by exploring that topic from multiple perspectives. Students who choose to pursue a thematic track may opt out at any time; the only requirement is to complete the basic structure of the general education program.

As noted above, the thematic tracks option is not intended to compete with minors, which require more hours and are with few exceptions centered around a single discipline. However, the Task Force recommends that students be allowed to count courses completed as part of a thematic track toward the requirements for a minor where that is appropriate and applicable.

Other Recommendations

Students should be encouraged to take First Year Inquiry courses, to participate in Study Abroad programs, to participate in service learning experiences, to participate in research opportunities, and to engage in creative processes that are shared with audiences. However, it appears that currently there are not enough of these types of opportunities for all students to participate. Therefore the Task Force recommends that NCSU provide sufficient resources to

programs, courses, and activities that encompass these learning experiences so that most if not all students could enjoy one or more of these opportunities.

Additional Information

- Courses taken to satisfy major requirements may also satisfy General Education Program requirements.
- It is strongly recommended that all programs include at least three hours of free electives in their curricula.
- While programs may require transfer students to take additional courses for the major, the General Education Program is portable across the university.

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