

Faculty Senate Agenda Item

Number: 08-11

SUBJECT: Revised skill sets for general education

Background: Faculty surveys suggest significant dissatisfaction with the existing nine designated general-education skills, with particular discontent about the “listen sensitively” and “interpret and assess human values” skills. In addition, it has been suggested (but not empirically demonstrated) that students can complete general-education requirements without fulfilling all nine skills. And in addition, as the university moves toward more rigorous standards of assessment, that the existing nine skills lack any clear definitions has become problematic.

Proposal: In revising skills, the aim is to provide a simplified and clear system with measurable student-learning outcomes to facilitate assessment. The proposed alternative consists of five groups of skills; any general-education course should fulfill the requirements of at least two (although many will cover more); courses within selected divisions or departments, as noted below, necessarily must fulfill at least one of the listed skills to ensure comprehensive coverage of all for any student completing general-education requirements. Establishing global citizenship as a general-education skill recognizes the growing importance of both a citizenship component in general education and a sense of the need to train students to perform in a world increasingly shaped by processes of globalization.

1) Processing information/Information literacy

Processing information/Information literacy entails understanding and demonstrating comprehension of written texts, oral communications, visual information, and/or mediated presentations (film, websites, etc.) that combine several of the above. When presented with such materials, the student must be able to demonstrate an understanding of the basic argument of the materials, their core content, their intended audience, and their evident biases or subjective perspectives. Students should also be able to find such information, employing library resources, databases, and other search devices and technological tools.

All general-education courses will fulfill this skill.

2) Communicative skills

Communicative skills involve the ability of the student to communicate clearly his or her ideas in written and/or oral form, and they embrace as well the expression of creativity by students in the visual, written, or performing arts. In written and/or oral communication, students must demonstrate the ability to shape a central thesis, to organize an argument, to cite references properly, and to follow the rules of basic grammar and usage. In creative projects, students must be able to demonstrate the ways in which their creative work expresses ideas, an understanding of the form(s) employed, and an ability to employ the basic rules of their chosen expressive form(s).

Communicative skills is a required element in any course approved for general education in the humanities and social sciences.

3) Mathematical and scientific reasoning

Students must be able to reason mathematically, and be able to interpret and analyze numerical data. Students must also understand the scientific method, and be able to distinguish between scientific and non-scientific theories. Within this framework, students should be able, employing the standard methods and procedures of the science being studied, to propose hypotheses, design experiments to test these hypotheses, and interpret the results of experiments. Standardized testing can provide an assessment method for mathematical reasoning; performance on other written work can provide a mechanism for assessing a student's understanding of the scientific method and experimental design.

All general-education courses in the natural sciences and mathematics must fulfill the appropriate portion of this skill; that students must take courses in both mathematics and natural science to fulfill degree requirements ensures that the entirety of this skill will be comprehended in any student's progress toward a degree.

4) Critical, analytic, normative, and interpretive reasoning.

Students must demonstrate a variety of interconnected reasoning skills in the construction and critique of both factual and value judgments. They must know how to establish or corroborate factual claims and to analyze and assess the soundness of deductive arguments and the strength of inductive arguments built on those claims. They must know how to analyze and assess arguments establishing or using normative principles in ethics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, statesmanship, and other normative or value-laden human concerns. They must know how to assess the form, and interpret the content, of the creative expression of ideas in art, architecture, literature, music, and performing arts. Reasoning in these terms can be assessed by evaluating how well students, in their written or oral presentations, assess the information presented to them or construct their own arguments, positions, or theses.

All general education courses in the humanities and social sciences will include this skill.

5) Global citizenship

Students should understand, in political, historical, economic, and cultural terms, the nature and structure of the United States; its place both within a global community of nations and in the context of a globalized economic, political, and cultural sphere; and their own role as citizens within this national and international framework.

Courses in United States and world history, anthropology and sociology, political science, geography, and economics contribute components to this understanding of global citizenship, and courses will be required to address such components to be counted as general education.