

Summary of the Report of the BFC Task Force on the Future of General Education in the Third Century of the Bloomington Campus

This summary is a high-level overview of the full report from the Task Force. We encourage people to read this summary understanding that it omits the background materials included in the full report. Additionally, the ideas expressed here are absent context and details. Where the reader needs more information, they will find it in the full report.

The current implementation of Gen Ed at IU dates back to 2009. The Task Force examined two questions: how does Indiana University's current Gen Ed program rate, and how could it be strengthened? After three years of study, consultations and conversations with the faculty, staff, administrators and students of Indiana University Bloomington and beyond, we offer suggestions and observations.

Analysis and Critique of Current Program

We identify the following categories of issues with the current implementation of Gen Ed:

1. Competition for Gen Ed credits
2. Student confusion
3. Student rejection
4. Faculty confusion
5. Substantive weakness of the distribution method
6. Simultaneously insufficient *and* excessive oversight
7. Leakage
8. Side-lining of the optional "Shared Goals"
9. The particular vulnerability of the sustainability requirement
10. Precarity of the College's ability to support General Education

Criteria Guiding Reform

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> #1. The program should be comprehensible to students. #2. The program should feel meaningful and legitimate to students. #3. The faculty should believe and be invested in the reform proposals. #4. The program should align value and feasibility for the campus. |
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Four Categories of Reform Proposals

The BFC EC charged the Task Force to make "recommendations for evolutionary change" to the requirements and structure of general education. The distance between ideal solutions to problems identified in Gen Ed and pragmatic institutional limitations has been a constant tension throughout our process; we resolved this tension by establishing a vision or regulative ideal alongside a flexible, graduated set of options for change that will move us toward this ideal. In practical terms, the Task Force developed four categories of recommendation:

1. a full four-year general education *framework* (first-year experience, reformed distribution approach, senior capstone) as a vision for a robust third-century general education program;

2. a concrete plan to refigure the distributed Common Ground courses (an “Enduring & Urgent Questions” approach) immediately;
3. the strengthening of an existing themed requirement (social justice);
4. practical administrative changes for the smoother functioning of the current system: i.e. *de minimis* concrete steps for fixing flaws in the current program.

The Racial Justice (“Diversity”) Requirement

The Task Force proposes a fulfillment of the commitment the BFC made in April of 2016 to a student Diversity Task Force which recommended a required, curricular “social justice” course taught by campus-wide self-selected faculty and led by an administrative coordinator of social justice education.

Institutional Adjustments

In order to implement a genuinely effective Gen Ed reform, the administration can and should reform the mechanisms of finance to best support general education learning outcomes for the third century *as determined by the faculty*.

Overlays are alignments of new and old requirements to continue to serve students operating on old requirements. These will be necessary for the transitional period of any change.

Peer review should become the primary method of Gen Ed course assessment.

We must find a solution to the problem of Math modeling, perhaps by eliminating this specific requirement and broadening the scope to include courses in formal logic, quantitative reasoning, or statistics. Alternatively, by expanding access to Math M-106, “The Mathematics of Decision and Beauty”, or similar courses with small section sized and enhanced student support.

Consider the option of moving credit requirements in Breadth of Inquiry distribution courses to facilitate the reforms proposed here, for example by requiring one instead of two courses in each distribution area. The other credits required in Gen Ed (the state mandates a total of 30 credits) could be flexible in any of the 3 areas or could enable development of first-year experience, Enduring and Urgent Questions, and Capstone courses.

De Minimis Overall Administrative Improvements to Current Program

- Replace current assessment of Gen Ed with the less bureaucratic peer review process;
- Clarify and simplify the presentation of our General Education;
- Improve communication to all faculty teaching General Education course;
- Improve transparency in the process of proposing General Education courses;
- Revisit the structure of committees implementing the General Education program;
- Enlist the university Communications office in a major, sustained campaign to help form student understanding of and appreciation for general education;
- Encourage OVPUE and faculty directors of required multi-section Gen Ed courses to work collaboratively to address instructor supply issues;
- Allow upper-level courses to count towards Gen Ed requirements when the instructor deems it appropriate.

Conclusion

Once the BFC has received and discussed the recommendations of the Task Force, the BFC Educational Policies Committee (EPC) and Constitution and Rules Committee (CARC) should jointly constitute a follow-up Task Force charged with creating specific policies and changing existing ones in order to implement the reforms proposed here.

All experience points to the superiority of Gen Ed programs that include the three reform components analyzed above:

- a first-year experience centered in the College of Arts and Sciences;
- an examination of enduring and urgent questions;
- a capstone experience centered in the student's major or in COAS.