

OSU General Education Task Force

Report

9/16/2013

Introduction

In 2011, the OSU General Education Task Force was formed to review the General Education curriculum at Oklahoma State University. The Task Force was to consider general education at Oklahoma State University in the face of shifting educational landscapes: changing students, changing faculty, diverse societal expectations, evolving structures of higher education, and how general education serves to advance OSU's land-grant mission. The Task Force was further to consider if there were ways to enhance student learning and reduce barriers to timely graduation through changes in OSU's General Education program.

Having undertaken a deliberate and thorough examination of OSU's General Education program, with this report, we submit recommendations regarding OSU's General Education that we feel will improve the learning experience and outcomes of OSU's students. We believe implementation of these recommendations will result in a more effective program of General Education, one supported across the academy, and one that prepares our students to be successful and effective in their careers. We recommend that the proposed changes be implemented for the 2014-2015 degree requirements.

Background

Oklahoma State University General Education requirements are guided by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), which directs that general education must include:

- 6 hours – English Composition
- 6 hours – United States History and Government
- 6 or 7 hours – Science (one must be laboratory) – OSU 'N' and 'L' designations
- 6 hours – Humanities (non-performance) – OSU 'H' designation
- 3 hours – Mathematics - OSU 'A' designation
- 3 hours – Psychology, Social Sciences, Foreign Languages, Fine Arts – OSU 'S' designation
- These courses sum to 30 or 31 hours. OSRHE
- 9 or 10 hours – Additional general education (liberal arts and sciences) courses to meet the OSRHE required total of 40 hours.

The OSU General Education curriculum has been further expanded and restricted to include extras in some of the categories directed by the OSRHE: (3 additional “A” credits and 3 additional “S” credits) as well as extra categories (International Dimension (“I”) and Diversity (“D”) courses that do not require additional credits). This method of delivering general education is called a distribution model. Additional requirements have been prescribed by OSU regarding the general education distribution requirements. For example, general education courses are expected to have few if any pre-requisites and most of the general education-designated/approved courses have a mandated writing component.

After examining the current OSU General Education program, the Task Force identified several goals regarding general education.

1. OSU’s General Education program should support timely graduation.
2. OSU’s General Education program should be systematically and comprehensively reviewed.
3. Broader participation (and pride in) the general education program by students, faculty and departments should be fostered. Impediments to participation should be removed so more courses (appealing to more students and faculty) are available.
4. OSU General Education should include significant participation and input from our best teachers. These teachers should understand the overall goals of general education including how their course fits into the OSU General Education program. They will ideally incorporate an explanation of these goals (macro & micro) into their courses so that students know they are taking a general education course and why.
5. OSU General Education should be based on and defined by achievable and widely-accepted/endorsed learning outcomes. The learning objectives should provide a rationale for course content and for co-curricular programs and address service learning, civic engagement, teamwork, sustainability, wellness, creativity, and applied learning throughout the curriculum, within and beyond general education.
6. The OSU General Education program should be something that is accepted and promoted by faculty, staff and administration as a good thing worth the effort we expend on it.

To address these goals, the OSU General Education Task Force recommends the following:

Recommendation 1

The “30-10” General Education Plan

With the exception of the designation of levels of Mathematics courses, the 30 general education hours (and categories) mandated by the State Regents would be unspecified courses on the degree plan, resulting in 30 hours that would be transferrable to any OSU undergraduate program. This would facilitate progress toward graduation for students who change majors, for transfer students, and empower students to have as much flexibility as possible in their general education requirements.

Consistent with Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) requirements, OSU General Education Requirements shall be:

6 hours – English Composition

6 hours – United States History and Government

6 or 7 hours* – Science (one must be laboratory) – OSU ‘N’ and ‘L’ designations

6 hours – Humanities (non-performance) – OSU ‘H’ designation

3 hours** – Mathematics or Statistics - OSU ‘A’ designation

3 hours – Social and Behavioral Sciences – OSU ‘S’ designation

30 or 31 hours

* Most general education science courses (N-designation) with a lab are 4 hours. Stating 6 hours are required, when two 3-hour courses are not available for most students, is misleading. So, most degrees will need to specify 7 hours of Natural Science.

** OSU Departments/Colleges may specify level or course of mathematics.

9 or 10 hours – Additional general education (liberal arts and sciences) courses to meet the OSRHE required total of 40 hours.

Departments or colleges may not specify more than 10 general education credit hours. Additional general education courses may be specified as particular courses only in the

case of formal written external accreditation or certification requirements and with the approval of the Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education.

The OSU requirements for International (I) and Diversity (D) may be satisfied by a course in any part of a student's degree plan.

Recommendation 2

The OSU General Education program will be systematically reviewed, maintained and improved by a guiding coalition of faculty and administration that will advise on the continued applicability of the learning outcomes, goals, assessment, development, modification, execution, and quality of instruction. Changes to, and improvements in, the OSU General Education program should be made in the spirit and practice of shared governance.

Recommendation 3

The number of prerequisites shall not be a determination of general education designations.

Recommendation 4

OSU should develop a systematic approach to equipping faculty to teach general education courses in a way that will help students attain the desired learning outcomes. Specific professional development opportunities should be made available for instructors of general education courses. To encourage instructors of general education courses at Oklahoma State University to review and understand the student learning goals for general education, we recommend that Academic Affairs provide additional professional development opportunities on an ongoing basis. Workshops may focus on the aims of general education, statistics regarding OSU students' performance in major areas of assessment, strategies for creating effective assignments, and related topics. Instructors of general education courses at OSU should be required to participate in general education professional development, at the discretion of the unit administrator and/or college dean. A certificate program that provides faculty with concrete

recognition that they have participation in a series of in-depth general education workshops should be considered.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the office of Academic Affairs identify avenues to encourage departments to implement service learning, civic engagement, teamwork, sustainability, wellness, creativity, and applied learning throughout the curriculum, within and beyond general education. By way of guidance, the task force recommends the following broad principles for further development of general education at Oklahoma State University.

Essential Learning Outcomes

Oklahoma State University's General Education Program¹:

Intellectual and Practical Abilities

Written and oral communication

- Effectively use written, oral, and visual communication strategies using a variety of contexts, styles, and conventions
- Communicate ideas, reasons, problems, and solutions to multiple audiences
- Select the communication strategy most appropriate for the audience and content
- Use communication strategies appropriate to the student's major discipline

Critical thinking and problem solving

- Recognize problems, apply critical analyses, and develop creative solutions
- Distinguish between value assertions and statements of fact
- Check the validity of assumptions and logic of statements and models
- Evaluate the accuracy and validity of findings and conclusions
- Generate solutions to complex problems and assess the resulting consequences

¹ Adapted from AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise Essential Learning Outcomes and the VALUE rubrics

Quantitative literacy

- Apply quantitative principles and methods to solve problems
- Draw conclusions from computational and symbolic representations
- Apply quantitative, symbolic and logical reasoning to problems as appropriate to the student's major discipline

Information literacy

- Identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share information

Human Cultures and Human Expression

Historical perspectives

- Use methods of inquiry appropriate for the study of history to understand world and American history

Human expression and the human condition

- Use knowledge, historical perspectives, analysis, interpretation, critical evaluation and standards of evidence of the humanities to address problems and issues
- Apply knowledge theories and methods of the arts to understand their context and significance

World cultures

- Explain the importance of contemporary and historic world cultures
- Understand the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices

Intercultural knowledge and competence

- Describe perspectives linked to race, gender, and ethnicity in American society and in current international contexts

- Understand diverse viewpoints, including differing philosophical and cultural perspectives
- Apply intercultural knowledge to professional behavior in a variety of settings and cultural contexts
- Use knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures as appropriate to the student's major discipline

Scientific Literacy

- Apply scientific methods and knowledge to the study of the natural and physical world
- Apply scientific knowledge, theories, and methods to evaluate human behavior
- Use scientific principles and methods as appropriate to the student's major discipline

Personal and Social Responsibility

Ethical reasoning and action

- Use reason to make ethical judgments
- Use ethical principles, leadership and stewardship to benefit society
- Apply ethical judgment and reasoning as appropriate to the context of the student's major discipline

Civic knowledge and engagement: local and global

- Recognize the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of citizenship locally and globally
- Explain the importance of living sustainably as an individual and as part of a society

Teamwork

- Understand and apply factors and strategies that contribute to effective team dynamics
- Complete a team project in the student's major discipline with greater quality and scope than would be expected from an individual

Wellness

- Apply key elements of personal responsibility including mental and physical health and financial responsibility to the student's own life

Creative, Integrative and Applied Learning

Integration and synthesis of these abilities, skills, and knowledge across the general education program and the student's major degree for the generation of a creative or scholarly product in a capstone experience

- Creatively solve problems in the major discipline
- Combine knowledge, skills, abilities, and strategies across multiple disciplines
- Adapt knowledge and skills to new settings, questions and responsibilities
- Use integrated knowledge and skills to develop creative solutions to discipline-specific problems
- Produce a creative or scholarly product that integrates and synthesizes knowledge from multiple sources

Respectfully submitted, OSU General Education Task Force.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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