

**UNLV Faculty Senate
General Education Committee**

**10-Year Review of General Education at UNLV:
Select Recommendations for Ways the
Committee can Support Gen Ed in the Future**

May 13, 2022

The UNLV Faculty Senate General Education Committee (FSGEC) performed a select ten-year review of General Education. This report describes our motivation, our goals, our process, our findings to date, and our recommendations for future work.

Early in the Fall 2021 semester, the committee began discussing issues of course approval and general education assessment while reviewing petitions. In light of this, the Chair of the committee suggested the committee might perform research on the state of general education at UNLV. Since the last major update to the core curriculum was ten years ago, our initial thoughts were to review and reflect on the value of general education at UNLV by reassessing the values of general education to align more effectively with the UULOs, to assess the feasibility of moving some (or all) courses online, and to consider a wholesale recertification of approved general education courses.

Over the next several meetings, the committee explored a range of ideas for what this review might entail. Since we had neither the time nor the resources to perform a comprehensive review, the committee established a set of primary goals:

- understand current General Education materials and procedures
- discover how faculty and advisors feel about General Education
- determine ways that the committee can be proactive in the future to best support General Education and its stakeholders
- develop more effective and more efficient procedures for committee work in the future

These general goals allowed us to target specific areas for research. The Chair of the committee emphasized from the outset that this research should not be a review of EVERYTHING, should not be “re-doing” the work of experts on campus, should not be a judgement of the work performed by previous committees or departments, should not make more work for future general education committees; instead, the research should help the committee better understand our work so that future general education committees can work more effectively and more efficiently in supporting General Education at UNLV.

More importantly, the research did not have to be final or “finished” at the end of the academic year. In other words, the committee did not need to see this research as an end point for making pronouncements; instead, the committee performed this research as a necessary starting point for reflecting on our work and meeting our long-term goals as a committee. So the committee understood that there was no need to rush, that if a subcommittee did not complete all that they had hoped to accomplish, then the research could always pick up again next fall, and that the recommendations they would make are for how the committee can support general education more effectively in these areas in the future at this time.

Since this was not designed as a comprehensive review, and since our time and resources were limited, the committee chose to target three key areas of interest—General Education Assessment, Approved General Education Courses, Surveys of Key General Education Stakeholders—and three voluntary subcommittees were formed and performed research in these three areas over the course of the academic year.

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

The first area of research is general education assessment. The primary goal of the research for this subcommittee was to ultimately recommend a long-term process for the committee to support general education assessment, whether that might mean running regular queries with the Registrar or reviewing assessment data on a regular basis or working in concert with the Director of General Education and the UNLV Office of Assessment.

The subcommittee started with a 2017 report on assessment in general education, and while they did not fully understand why the research was done or if any of the recommendations were put into practice, they used the information in the report as a springboard for their current research.

The subcommittee then began reviewing recent General Education assessment data. Dr. Laurel Pritchard, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, was asked to provide any assessment plans or data sources or spreadsheets and/or raw numbers that they could review. She created a sub-folder in the FSGEC shared drive titled, "2022 Gen Ed Assessment Subcommittee," where she placed a Google document with links to the pages that house General Education assessment plans and reports, results from student surveys about UULO attainment, and accreditation reports that could possibly have supplemental information about General Education assessment. She also added a spreadsheet with data on retention rates for students who enroll in FYS in their first two semesters vs. those who do not. Throughout the year, Dr. Pritchard continued to gather sources of data and add them to the drive as she received them. Her help with this research was invaluable and very much appreciated.

The subcommittee then met for an initial planning meeting and agreed to all look over the data that had been compiled in the shared drive. As a general guideline, the subcommittee agreed to limit time spent to a few hours of dedicated review because part of their objective in doing this research was to get a sense of how much time this and related work may ultimately take the committee in the future.

This meant that they did not plan on an exhaustive review of all the information at their disposal, but that, instead, their primary goal would be a broad review for general impressions: what data was available, what data appears useful for the committee, if there were any big holes in the data, if any data appeared to be missing, and/or any other ideas that might arise from the review.

As a whole, the subcommittee reviewed the two brief FYS related documents and other material in the Gen Ed Assessment Links that were provided. Since the most substantial mass of information was in the Gen Ed Assessment Reports, the subcommittee split these up equitably among themselves, with each member getting their "home" college/school and then other colleges/schools at random. To assist with these reviews, the subcommittee used a shared document titled Impressions from Initial Review that was set up in a table format for posting quick thoughts/ reflections/ observations/ ideas from the initial review of the data and to maintain consistency across reviews.

Based on reviews of all of the data provided, the subcommittee offers the following takeaways:

- Exemplary, consistent reporting came from units including the School of Nursing; Urban Affairs, Social Work; Fine Arts, Theatre.
- On the whole, the subcommittee noted inconsistent collection of data and inconsistent methods of assessment.
- There was marked inconsistency in how often reports were submitted, including some committee units submitting information annually, some once every three years, and some in a less discernible pattern. It is the subcommittee's recommendation to encourage more uniform reporting, ideally on an annual basis.
- There was marked inconsistency in delivery of qualitative vs. quantitative information. While the subcommittee recognize each format has its merits and that they may correspond to units submitting them, they nonetheless resulted in extreme difficulty at drawing meaningful comparisons.
- The subcommittee observed a trend in students desiring more resources around career/professional development, but also reporting suggesting students tended not to make use of existing resources in this area.

Admittedly, there really is so much data available, that the subcommittee recommends that FSGEC should continue to study the data in order to develop a more comprehensive and long-term plan for implementation and working with the UNLV Office of Assessment and the new Director of General Education.

APPROVED GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

The second area of research is a review of all approved General Education courses on the Gen Ed core, distribution, multicultural, and international lists. The primary goal of the research for this subcommittee was to review our current course listings, determine the viability of these courses, and ultimately recommend a more effective process for evaluating course petitions that align with anticipated student and faculty needs, long-term assessment plans, and the long-term goals for general education at UNLV in the future.

As one subcommittee member stated:

I worked on a similar project at my previous university and we were able to easily identify 240 courses to be removed from the GEC by looking at usage data and also pre-reqs. In some cases, a course required a pre-req that counted for the same GEC category as that course so that course had no reason to be in the GEC because it would never be counted. I'm curious to see if that is the case at UNLV, as well.

The subcommittee started with the draft of a recertification process written in 2017. This document sought to establish a review process for all courses that were more than four years old in order to make sure they met expectations as a general education course. While there are interesting recommendations, the subcommittee was uncertain if they were put into practice. For example, is there a database of all Gen Ed courses, with required data elements? Or a contact list of unit administrators who are responsible for internal certification processes? Also, was a "periodic" filtering of the database been established to identify courses for which recertification is due? The subcommittee therefore used the information in the report as a springboard for their current research in order to, hopefully, put a working plan in place.

The subcommittee began their work on two fronts: 1) begin to define a "general education" course, and 2) review/evaluate our current courses to determine if they are appropriate. Dr. Laurel Pritchard again provided key documents for the subcommittee to review. She began with a request for an updated version of the custom report that the General Education Committee looked at in 2017, which would show all of the Gen Ed courses and how many students have used each course to fulfill a particular requirement in a defined 5-year window. She also offered to run a simpler query to show which Gen Ed courses have been offered each term.

Based on these requests, Dr. Pritchard shared a draft of a report from the MyUNLV team that showed the number of students over the past five years who have used each listed course to satisfy the indicated Gen Ed requirement. She sorted the list by requirement and in descending order by number of students who used each course. She also highlighted in green any course for which 1% or more of students in the sample used the course to satisfy the indicated requirement. She did, however, offer some caveats:

1. The data set isn't complete yet. It currently only includes freshmen, sophomores and juniors. We should have an updated report soon that includes seniors.
2. It only includes the distribution areas, but she would need to create a separate report for core requirements or Multicultural/International courses.

Melissa Morris, subcommittee member, performed an initial simple analysis to satisfy her own curiosity. She took the Spring 2022 Gen Ed Course Offering

Spreadsheet from the Google Drive and looked up the Pre-reqs for each 400-level course. It appears there are many courses (mostly in PSY, PHYS, MATH, languages, CHEM, and BIOL) that have SEVERAL pre-reqs and many of those pre-reqs have pre-reqs! She provided the subcommittee with a spreadsheet that highlighted these courses and that probably shouldn't be on any of the General Education approved courses lists. It may be likely that this is the case with many 300-level courses, as well, but she did not extend her analysis at this point. She showed very quickly, however, that an examination of usage data can easily show if any of the courses with multiple pre-reqs have actually been used to fulfil a Gen Ed requirement.

After further discussion, the subcommittee recommended that FSGEC adopt the following proposed criteria and then, beginning in the Fall 2022 semester, start evaluating current courses on the General Education approved courses lists.

The subcommittee recommends that following criteria for determining whether courses should remain on an approved list as part of the General Education Curriculum:

1. Pre-requisites
 - If a class requires more than two (or three?) prerequisites, it should be excluded from the General Education curriculum; further, if a class requires only one prerequisite but THAT prerequisite requires more than one (or two?) prerequisite, it should be excluded
2. Enrollment History
 - If a course has a limited (definition to be determined) enrollment history, it should be excluded from the General Education curriculum
3. Course Availability
 - If a course has NOT been offered within the previous five (or maybe seven?) years, it should be excluded from the General Education curriculum

As per a suggestion from Jacob Thompson, the incoming Director of General Education, at the last FSGEC committee meeting, the subcommittee also recommends that the Faculty Senate General Education Committee use this set of criteria to review all courses on a regular basis, possibly every five to seven years. This criteria should also be used as part of a General Education Recertification process, either for all courses or, especially, for any course that has been excluded based on an FSGEC review of approved courses.

SURVEYS OF KEY GENERAL EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

The third area of research is a survey of key general education stakeholders at UNLV. The primary goal of this subcommittee was to create two surveys: one for academic faculty and one for academic advisors to gauge both their understanding

of general education and their thoughts on general education as a key feature of the student experience.

The subcommittee met throughout the spring semester. They developed draft survey instruments for both academic faculty and advisors, determining survey length, survey categories, all potential questions, and a timeline for completing and distributing the surveys. Once they had complete drafts, they were vetted through the full General Education Committee, and through select pilot faculty and advisors, all of whom contributed many positive ideas to improve the drafts.

The survey for Academic Faculty (see Appendix A) opened on April 12, with each college representative on the FSGEC charged with sending the link out to faculty in their respective college/school. These emails included the following introduction:

Colleagues:

The Faculty Senate General Education committee is undertaking a ten year review of the last major update to the General Education core curriculum. We are seeking your input on the validity and effectiveness of that update, and your ideas on the future of general education at UNLV. Please take a moment to click on the link below and fill out our survey. It should take less than 10 minutes.

Currently, 242 surveys have been completed out of approximately 1,000 eligible respondents. We do not know, and possibly will never know, the exact number as different units used different methods for distributing the link to faculty.

For the academic advisors, Dr. Laurel Pritchard and Dr. Jacob Thompson—both in the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education—sent out the link to the advisor’s survey (see Appendix B). At this time there are 54 responses out of approximately 80 recipients.

While the committee has tentative results currently, we will continue to monitor responses and perform a full analysis of the results in Fall 2022.

Based on the final analysis of the responses, FSGEC, in consultation with the Director of General Education, may explore the possibility of performing interviews of select respondents or conduct focus groups. Dr. Pritchard has volunteered to put events on the Faculty Center calendar to help with this possible direction.

SOME TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS GOING FORWARD

As stated above, our intention was not a make-work project, not to generate a report that will sit in a Drive folder someplace, not to pile extra work on future General Education Committees; instead, we want this research to inform our practices and guide our work as a committee in the future.

In summary, the recommendations from each subcommittee and plans going forward include the following:

- Build on the assessment findings from this year's subcommittee and continue to study the data in order to develop a more comprehensive and long-term plan for implementation and working with the UNLV Office of Assessment and the new Director of General Education.
- Accept the recommended criteria for evaluating General Education courses, review/evaluate all current courses, and establish a process that regularly reviews all courses, possibly every five to seven years, which might also be included as part of a General Education Recertification process, either for all courses or, especially, for any course that has been excluded based on a FSGEC review of approved courses.
- Perform a full analysis of the survey responses, consider interviewing select respondents or conducting focus groups, and work with the Director of General Education to determine how these responses might guide General Education plans in the future.

CONCLUSION

As a final note, I want to formally acknowledge the really wonderful work that this committee did for this 10-Year Review of General Education at UNLV, research and analysis that truly went above and beyond the call of duty. This project really was extra work, but they willingly took up the challenge, and I, as Chair of the Faculty Senate General Education Committee, am extremely grateful to all of them.

This report is respectfully submitted to Dr. Shannon Sumpter, the outgoing Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Rhonda Montgomery, the incoming Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Jacob Thompson, the incoming Director of General Education, and Dr. Laurel Pritchard, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education on May 13, 2022.

Dr. Ed Nagelhout
Chair, Faculty Senate General Education Committee

APPENDIX A – Survey Questions for Academic Faculty – May 7, 2022

Q1 How familiar are you with the General Education requirements for the undergraduate students in your discipline?

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0

Q2 How familiar are you with the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs)

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0

Q3 Which of the following best describes your participation in General Education?'

Answered: 241 Skipped: 1

Q4 Comments on these questions?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 203

Q5 Students would be best served by increased emphasis on their General Education

Answered: 226 Skipped: 16

Q6 General Education works well for students in its current form

Answered: 226 Skipped: 16

Q7 Students would benefit from a more focused General Education program with fewer options.

Answered: 226 Skipped: 16

Q8 General Education is an outdated concept which no longer serves students' needs.

Answered: 226 Skipped: 16

Q9 Comments on these questions?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 175

Q10 First Year Seminars should be required for all students.

Answered: 225 Skipped: 17

Q11 Second Year Seminars should be required for all students.

Answered: 224 Skipped: 18

Q12 Comments on these questions?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 175

Q13 My department's Milestone Experience is an effective learning experience.

Answered: 222 Skipped: 20

Q14 My department's Culminating Experience is an effective learning experience.
Answered: 222 Skipped: 20

Q15 Comments on these questions?
Answered: 41 Skipped: 201

Q16 An International course should be required for all students.
Answered: 223 Skipped: 19

Q17 A Multicultural course should be required for all students.
Answered: 223 Skipped: 19

Q18 Comments on these questions?
Answered: 57 Skipped: 185

Q19 The number of credits in the GE Program (40-52 depending on department) is
Answered: 221 Skipped: 21

Q20 The Distribution Requirements are appropriate as designed.
Answered: 219 Skipped: 23

Q21 What else do we need to know about General Education at UNLV?
Answered: 52 Skipped: 190

Q22 My college is
Answered: 202 Skipped: 40

Q23 I have been at UNLV
Answered: 214 Skipped: 28

Q24 I am [TITLE]
Answered: 213 Skipped: 29

APPENDIX B – Survey Questions for Academic Advisors

Q1 How familiar are you with the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs)

Answered: 54 Skipped: 0

Q2 Which of the following best describes your participation in General Education?'

Answered: 54 Skipped: 0

Q3 Comments on this page?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 52

Q4 Students would be better served by an increased emphasis on General Education

Answered: 46 Skipped: 8

Q5 The General Education program works well for students in its current form

Answered: 46 Skipped: 8

Q6 Students would benefit from a more focused General Education program with fewer options.

Answered: 46 Skipped: 8

Q7 General Education is an outdated concept which no longer serves students' needs.

Answered: 46 Skipped: 8

Q8 Comments on this page?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 38

Q9 My unit's First Year Seminars serve students well.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q10 My unit's Second Year Seminars serve students well.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q11 Comments on this page?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 44

Q12 I find it easy to explain the General Education requirements to students.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q13 I find it easy to create a meaningful General Education experience for my students.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q14 Comments on the page?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 47

Q15 I have no problems finding International courses appropriate for my students.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q16 I have no problem finding Multicultural courses appropriate for my students.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q17 Comments on this page?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 48

Q18 The number of credits in the GE Program (40-52 depending on department) is

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q19 I have no problems finding appropriate Distribution Courses for my students.

Answered: 45 Skipped: 9

Q20 What else do we need to know about General Education at UNLV?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 45

Q21 My college/unit is

Answered: 41 Skipped: 13

Q22 I have been at UNLV

Answered: 41 Skipped: 13

Q23 I am [TITLE]

Answered: 41 Skipped: 13