

General Education Program Review

Executive Summary

Leanne Merrill, Director of General Education and Student Transitions

Dates of Program Review:	September 2023 – July 2024
External Reviewer Visit:	May 2024
External Reviewer:	Stephanie Dyer, Sonoma State University
Self-Study Authors:	Shaun Huston, Outgoing Director of General Education Jay Schwartz, General Education PLC Chair Robert Forbis, General Education Committee Member

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: General Education Program Review

The General Education Program Review process was shaped by areas of inquiry identified by the General Education Committee in Fall 2023. These areas were: Scheduling & Enrollment; Assessment; Student Navigation of Requirements; and Barriers to Completion. Sources of information in the review include data from Institutional Research; surveys of faculty and staff advisors; previous assessment reports associated with General Education Learning Outcomes; and basic informational sources such as the WOU Catalog and WOU Website.

The review was led by the Director of General Education, Shaun Huston, and he was assisted in writing the Self-Study by General Education Committee members Jay Schwartz and Robert Forbis. The General Education Committee reviewed the Self-Study before it was finalized. Stephanie Dyer, Director of the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies and General Education Committee Chair at Sonoma State University, was our external reviewer, and completed the external review at the close of the academic year.

All parts of the program review yielded useful information, though in some cases, the findings led to more questions than answers, and some areas will require further investigation before an action plan can be fully developed. In particular, the ways in which students navigate the program and the possible barriers they run into along the way are areas for further study.

The external review helped either uncover or further clarify possible ways of handling known issues around scheduling and assessment. The process of data review and meaning-making also points towards possible solution strategies around overall program structure and governance.

The program review emphasized the following programmatic strengths:

- Intentionally developed program that allows for student flexibility and choice
- Robust list of approved courses in nearly all General Education areas
- Emerging assessment framework and culture developing around General Education Learning Outcomes
- Students are taking the intended amount of credits at the intended times to complete the General Education Program on their path towards graduate

The following challenges were identified:

- Lack of centralized course scheduling, limited offerings of some courses, and late class cancellations create schedule bottlenecks and increases unpredictability of offerings
- Lack of clarity around relationship between General Education Committee and Professional Learning Committee groups
- No curriculum map or other way of ensuring progression through learning
- Assessment process has not yet “closed the loop”
- Lack of clarity around General Education Learning Outcomes and their relationship to University Learning Outcomes
- Equity gaps in success rates in several General Education areas

The following opportunities for improvement were suggested:

- Centralize scheduling of General Education courses to ensure availability and normalize enrollment across sections and areas
- Institute a course recertification cycle for General Education courses and make review criteria transparently tied to learning outcomes
- Further investigate the connection between General Education Learning Outcomes and University Learning Outcomes, particularly at the Foundational Skill level, and consider revising outcomes to include College Transitions/Lifelong Learning
- Institute qualitative assessment processes alongside existing work sample scoring
- Incorporate findings from assessment into curricular processes and faculty development opportunities
- Create and implement a General Education Curriculum Map and use it to guide course sequencing and advising
- Reduce the reliance on the General Education petition process by working to develop more robust transfer articulation systems
- Work with faculty to decrease equity gaps via monitoring, informing, and providing professional development

Western Oregon University's General Education Program launched in Fall 2019 and represents a dramatic departure from the previous system, which had been in place for over 40 years. There is no question that this program is much more student-centered, coherently structured, and flexible than the previous core education design. Since 2019, the program has not changed significantly, but the courses within the program have proliferated and assessment and scheduling procedures have been slow to keep pace with this growth. It is time for WOU's General Education Program to enter its next phase of maturity. This will include more wholly capturing the way in which students demonstrate their experience of the General Education Learning Outcomes; supporting the way that students navigate choices within the program on a day-by-day, term-by-term, and year-by-year level by providing clear information and reducing barriers; and empowering faculty to provide intentionally-designed, well-aligned learning experiences that are accessible to all students.

The General Education Program Review process painted a clear picture of a strong but developing program. At the next review, we envision a program that has matured to include a learning-outcomes focused course trajectories that are understood and communicated by faculty, staff, and students; embedded assessment to inform continuous improvement; and seamless advising and registration processes for all students. In all of this, we will embrace diversity and foster community in order to eliminate equity gaps, because all WOU students deserve access to a curriculum that prepares them act as citizens of a complex world.