

General Education Foundations Self-Study

Current Mission

The published mission of the GEF ([General Education Foundations \(GEF\) | Office of the University Registrar | West Virginia University \(wvu.edu\)](#)) is:

To provide students with academic and intellectual breadth to appreciate the broad context of their actions, their choices, and their world, beyond their major field(s) of study. WVU aims to help students build the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to reason clearly, communicate effectively, think critically, and contribute to society.

The General Education Foundations (GEF) are designed to ensure that students meet these goals through inquiry-based learning across disciplines. In conjunction with a major field, and in consultation with their advisors, students will design programs of study that satisfy the GEF. The GEF works to fulfill the University's goals of (1) creating well-rounded students with a broad base of skills and knowledge, (2) linking together the courses that students take at WVU, and (3) instilling in students a permanent connection to learning and education, giving them the skills to learn what they need outside a formal educational environment.

The GEF strives to help students be thoughtful participants in a democratic society, and to achieve the intellectual integration and awareness they will need to adapt to changes and meet challenges in their personal, social, and professional lives.

Analysis

While the goals of the GEF are worthwhile, its breadth of stated purposes, diversity of learning outcomes, and volume of course offerings have made it impossible to meaningfully assess the stated goals and learning outcomes. Effectively, these difficulties have meant that over the last nine years the GEF program has neither been meaningfully assessed nor evaluated for student success (see [Appendix II](#)). The inability to assess learning in the GEF at the program level is an institutional-level concern given the upcoming accreditation reaffirmation with the Higher Learning Commission. Moreover, the quantity of GEF offerings (3-400 courses depending on the year) has led to an inefficient and costly structure (see [Appendix I](#)). The current size and scope of the GEF program undermines the program's financial stability and instructional efficiency.

There is also a lack of clarity at the current time about the roles and responsibilities of the major institutional stakeholders in general education—the Provost's Office, colleges and schools, departments, faculty, and Faculty Senate. That lack of clarity has contributed to some of the operational ineffectiveness of the current GEF program (see [Appendix II](#)).

The published mission and current GEF materials are also unclear about what the specific requirements and expectations are for courses to be considered a general education course (see [Appendix II](#)).

Recommended Changes

- There are 61 distinct courses at the 300-level or above. Since General Education courses are generally intended to precede the major in the plan of study, these courses should be removed from the GEF.
- There are 48 other distinct courses that have not been taught within the last three academic years. These courses should be removed from the GEF.
- There are 12 additional GEF courses with DFW rates above 20%. These courses should be reviewed to determine if they should be withdrawn from the GEF, or revised in some fashion, given the challenges they create for student success.
- The GEF Committee should work collaboratively with the Provost's Office to determine the requirements and expectations for general education courses moving forward.
- The GEF Committee should plan an assessment project for implementation in academic year 24-25.
- The GEF Committee should also determine which, if any, of the other structural or governance questions it will work to address at this time.

Open Structural Questions

- Could any of the GEF areas 4, 5, 6, or 7 be dissolved or combined and reduce the overall number of required credits in the general education program?
- What other experiences could be covered under Area 8 or a similar requirement to allow them to be degree pursuant?
- Should the Area 8 requirement be a part of the general education requirements or move to an institutional requirement like the Capstone requirement?
- How would removing the specific credit hour requirement in Area 8 impact degree pursuance for the experiences that are currently listed there?

Appendix I: GEF Structure and Efficiency Analysis

The structure of the GEF requires every WVU student to take 31 to 37 student credit hours across seven categories with 9 credits in an additional “focus” area. The relatively large number of GEF leaves fewer credits available for students to pursue in their major or as chosen electives, making it more difficult to limit overall instruction to 120 credits. WVU’s accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission has established that 30 credits in general education programs is the best practice but that institutions may deviate from that practice if a rationale can be provided.

The section below provides a broad overview of each GEF area and highlights the inefficiencies in course delivery under the current GEF implementation.

Area 1: Composition and Rhetoric (3 or 6 credits)

This area is delivered through three courses (ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 or ENGL 103) provided by the English department. The courses are writing intensive and relatively small (24 seats) but are offered efficiently and typically fill at a rate of 98% or better.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Under the new budget model, should other units who can provide writing courses within this area be permitted to do so?

Area 2: Science and Technology (4 to 6 credits)

This area includes 57 courses and includes lectures and labs. Six credits of lecture or a lecture / lab combination course of four credits are required to complete the area. Area 2 offers the most seats of any GEF category and a large proportion of its courses serve a dual purpose as major courses.

There is only one 300-level course offered in this area: AEM 341 and AEM 341L.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Should two courses (six credits) in non-lab science lecture courses continue to be required or can the requirement be changed to any one course within the sciences?
- 2) Under a revised general education model, should GEF and major requirements be separate instead of double counting in general education and the major?

Area 3: Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning (3 to 4 credits)

This area is composed of 17 courses, with all but four delivered by the School of Mathematics and Data Sciences in the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. Like Area 2, a large proportion of its courses are also specifically required for majors. Many of these courses have high DFW rates.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Under the new budget model, should other units who can provide meaningful courses within this area be permitted to do so?
- 2) Under a revised general education model, should GEF and major requirements be separate instead of double counting in general education and the major?

Area 4: Society and Connections (3 credits)

This area is composed of 61 courses from 35 distinct academic units. Ten of those courses are at the 300-level. Five have not been offered within the last three academic years. Nine have DFW rates above 20%. Five enroll fewer than 5% first-time freshmen (FTF) and another two serve less than 10% FTF. The Communication Studies department offers seven courses in this area, three of which are at the 300-level, three of which have DFW rates above 20%, and three of which serve less than 10% FTF in their enrolled students.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Can capacity in the following 10 courses be guaranteed to meet all FTF student scheduling needs for Area 4?
 - a. PSYC 101, SOCA 101, ECON 201, SEP 271, COMM 112, ADV 215, CDFS 112, HN&F 126, POLS 210, A&VS 275

Area 5: Human Inquiry and the Past (3 credits)

This area is composed of 67 courses from 18 distinct academic units. 19 of these courses are at the 300-level. 12 have not been offered within the last three academic years. Four have DFW rates above 20%. Eight serve less than 5% first-time freshmen (FTF) in their enrolled students and another two serve less than 10% FTF. The History Department has 19 courses in this area, one of which has not been offered in the last three academic years. The Philosophy Department offers 22 courses in this area, 14 of which are at the 300-level, four of which have not been offered in the last three academic years, three of which have DFW rates above 25%, and six of which of serve less than 10% FTF in their enrolled students.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Can capacity in the following seven units be guaranteed to meet all FTF student scheduling needs for this area: COMM, HIST, PHIL, WMAN, FNRS, PET, ENGR, RELG?
 - a. Could each of these units develop and deliver a single course dedicated to serving this area?

Area 6: The Arts and Creativity (3 credits)

This area is composed of 94 courses from 19 academic units. 13 of those courses are at the 300-level. 22 have not been offered within the last three academic years. Two have DFW rates above 20%. Seven serve less than 10% FTF. English has 33 courses in this area, eight of which have not been offered within the last three academic years, and one of which serves less than 10% FTF in its enrolled students. Music has 9 courses in this area, one of which has not been offered within the last three academic years, two of which have DFW rates above 20%, and two of which serve less than 10% FTF in their enrolled students.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Can capacity in the following eleven units be guaranteed to meet all FTF student scheduling needs for this area: ARHS, ART, DANC, ENGL, FILM, HUM, LARC, MUSC, PHIL, THET, WGST?
 - a. Could each of these units develop and deliver a single course dedicated to serving this area?

Area 7: Global Studies and Diversity (3 credits)

This area is composed of 103 courses from 36 distinct academic units. 19 of those courses are at the 300-level. 15 have not been offered within the last three academic years. Three have DFW rates above 20%. Fifteen serve less than 10% FTF. The History Department has eight courses in this area, four of which have not been offered within the last three academic years. Political Science has 8 courses in this area, four of which are at the 300-level, one of which has not been offered within the last three academic years, and three of which have DFW rates above 20%.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Can capacity in the following units/courses be guaranteed to meet all FTF student scheduling needs for this area: ANTH 105, SPAN, PSYC 281, GEOG 102, RELG 102, WGST 170, FRCH, CHIN, POLS 103, DSGN 140, AGEE 101, SOWK 147, ASP 220, MUSC 116, THET 170?

Area 8: Focus (9 credits)

This area is broad and ill-defined. It consists of nine credits of any GEF offering, a minor, a double-major, or a dual-degree.

Questions moving forward for this area include:

- 1) Could the credit hour requirement be removed and instead require students to complete one of a list of possible experiential learning experiences (study abroad, internship, co-op experience, etc.) or focused credential (minor, certificate, etc.)?
- 2) What other options could be added to this area to support degree pursuance for students in high impact practices and learning experiences?

Appendix II:

Improving Governance of the GEF

The GEF Committee has the following published ([General Education Foundations Committee | Faculty Senate | West Virginia University \(wvu.edu\)](#)) charge:

1. Review applications for new GEF courses and existing GEF courses.
2. Produce resources and educational opportunities to support the GEF and institutions to develop appropriate WVU Learning Goals.
3. Collaborate with other committees and any relevant administrative bodies on Outcomes Assessment of the GEF and other relevant assessment issues.
4. Address in a timely fashion any other issues pertinent to the success of the GEF.
5. Collect course-level assessment of the GEF as part of the application and review process.
6. Evaluate periodically national trends in general education and best practices, and implement changes as needed.

Questions that should be discussed and resolved regarding governance include:

- 1) Should the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee (FSCC) review proposals for new and changed GEF courses? These courses are included in CIM workflow and is it redundant to have a separate committee review?
- 2) Why has item 2 remained unfulfilled, and should this remain a governance charge? If so, is it the responsibility of Faculty Senate or the Provost's Office?
- 3) Why has item 3 remained unfulfilled, and should this remain a governance charge? It is the recommendation of the Provost's Office that, as the general education program is an institutional requirement, its assessment as a program is the responsibility of the Provost's Office moving forward.
- 4) What, if anything, has been done to support item 5?
 - a. Assessment of learning and evaluation of student success in the GEF has thus far not been meaningful, regular, or systematic. Given HLC accreditation requirements this issue must be addressed. Expectations for assessment of learning *at the course-level* must be made clear to the units and faculty delivering GEF courses. The composition and structure of the GEF could be altered to permit meaningful assessment of learning, including meaningful curriculum mapping.
 - b. Should the Provost's Office should be made responsible for coordinating assessment of learning and the evaluation of student success in these courses, the Provost's Office would then work with the Faculty Senate to implement changes based upon the results of those assessments.
 - c. Published learning outcomes ([GEF Assessment | Faculty Senate | West Virginia University \(wvu.edu\)](#)) do not reflect the work of the GEF committee to update those over the past several academic years and should be updated.

- 5) Faculty Senate and the Provost's Office should set the expectations for general education courses collaboratively, including scheduling accessibility, modality options, availability across locations, quality expectations, and assessment of learning expectations.
 - a. Faculty Senate should be responsible for the periodic, regular, and systematic review of these expectations.
 - b. The Provost's Office could be responsible for enforcing these expectations and the removal of courses or units that are unable to meet expectations.
- 6) In anticipation of the new revenue model, Faculty Senate and the Provost's Office should collaboratively set the guidelines about both:
 - a. How many courses a particular academic unit can offer across all GEF areas?
 - b. How many courses a particular academic unit can offer within one specific GEF area?
- 7) Should Faculty Senate inform the evaluation of teaching in GEF courses?
- 8) Address scheduling to ensure that each area has a requisite number of seats, courses, days, times, locations, and modality offerings is the responsibility of the Provost's Office and Dean's Offices.