

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT RETREAT

OVERVIEW OF GEAC PRESENTATIONS

I- Dr. Cacicedo: Overall Introduction

I'm going to give you an overview of the revisions to general studies that we're proposing. To do so I want to remind you of some of the stuff we all have already accomplished. First, remember that we produced and voted on a list of objectives for the general studies curriculum, organized around three major components—**Knowing the World, Understanding the World, and Engaging with the World**. Each of those components then has specific elements that we wanted general studies to foster in our students, from understanding how different disciplines approach the universe of knowledge in different ways, to developing intellectual skills that enable critical reflection on that knowledge, and finally to applying those skills to concrete experiences—whether those experiences focus on doing service learning or on writing an extended study of Shakespeare's sonnets.

In second place, I also want to remind you that the general goals and their specific elements are tied to a framework of outcomes that we discussed at the beginning of last year and that are fundamentally interwoven in all aspects of the revision that we're considering. I know that the word "outcomes" might remind us of some of the nastier implications of No Child Left Behind. But those narrow, bullet-point sorts of outcomes are not what we discussed. Fundamentally, what we talked about was to make it increasingly possible that graduates of Albright College would become thoughtful and engaged members of the human species. So we thought that our students should be able to **reflect** on what they are learning because reflection will help them become conscious of how their general studies courses are reframing the way they perceive the world. We also thought that students should be given the opportunity to **integrate** their learning, so that general studies is not simply a smorgasbord of options that may or may not cohere. Instead we hoped that we could present a general studies curriculum that would give students the opportunity to see how disparate areas of learning are necessary to each other in filling out the shape of the universe they inhabit. Equally important, we thought, was fostering in students the skills necessary to **communicate** their perceptions. And, finally, as a consequence of reflection, integration, and communication, we thought that students should be able to **assess** their learning—in other words, by the end of their careers at Albright, students should be able to recognize that they have been challenged to perceive their world in new and more comprehensive ways. That student-centered assessment, of course, will also make it more possible for us to do the kind of assessment that agencies like Middle States—and people like Margaret Spellings—want us to perform.

With all that in mind, let me say a couple of things about the revisions we'll be considering in more detail today. First of all, the four elements of the framework I've outlined—reflection, integration, communication, and assessment—presuppose that general studies is a longitudinal phenomenon. We have to conceive of general studies as

a developmental process, as sequential and graded as any discipline. So the actual revision falls into three major developmental groups.

First, there's the first year experience, which we've tried to deal with in so many ways here at Albright that I've lost count. The element that has always been missing from our efforts, however, is that we've considered the first year experience as something superadded to the academic work of the students. Now, in this revision, we make the first year experience central to the students' academic focus. The first year seminars, one each semester, are intended to introduce students to what it means to have an academic discipline. Implied in that idea, and made very explicit in the way that we've suggested the seminars be structured, is also the point that an accounting of the world must be interdisciplinary because discrete disciplines will, even at their best, give only a partial understanding of the world. Back in the 19th century, in his essay "On Liberal Knowledge," Cardinal Newman put the point very succinctly: "Knowledge, in proportion as it tends more and more to be particular, ceases to be Knowledge. . . . Not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the Universe is the boast, or at least the ambition, of Philosophy." I'd add that by "philosophy" here Newman does not mean the academic discipline, which in its way is as particular and narrow-minded as any other discipline. Rather he means philosophy as the love of knowledge.

Second, there's the sophomore and junior year courses in general studies. As you've seen from the materials you've been reading for this retreat, we have proposed two different but parallel ways to engage students in general studies courses during those two years of their tenure at Albright. In both cases, however, the focus of the sophomore and junior year courses is to exercise the disciplinary and interdisciplinary imaginations of our students. Although they do it in different ways, the two alternatives we will be considering in more detail present students with clusters of courses. I hope you see that ultimately the point of joining courses into clusters is to provide students with coherence within a diversity of disciplinary perspective.

Third, there's the senior seminar in general studies. Here again we're presented with alternative approaches to this course, but in either case the purpose of the seminar is to afford students the opportunity to reflect on their education and to come to a considered understanding of what they have accomplished in their intellectual development. My own sense of these senior seminars in general studies is that, almost inevitably, they will conflate general studies and concentrations—not in the detail of what the seminars do, but rather in the sense that the intellectual changes that a student undergoes are as much within their chosen field of study as they are in general studies. The seminar, however, will give students the opportunity to recognize the interrelation among the two major branches of their undergraduate education.

I am deliberately not saying anything about the category of "other requirements" because it seems to me that, with few exceptions, those requirements will be accommodated within the three developmental groups of courses that I've outlined. And so let me turn it over to Steve, who will take us through the first year seminars in a bit more detail.

II- Dr. Mech: The Freshman Seminar Proposal

Hello everyone. I am going to briefly outline our proposal for the Freshman Seminar. As you can see in the materials Andrea sent, we are proposing a two-semester freshman seminar which, in essence, combines the current requirements of English 101-102, Freshman Forum, and IDS. Overall, the goals of this seminar are to introduce the students to “**Knowing the world**” and “**Understanding the world**” including an introduction to the fundamentals of knowledge at the college level.

We envision having the current English 101 and 102 instructors participate in the Freshman Seminars as the writing fellows. They will be responsible for meeting with the students at least two hours per week and providing reviews, advice, and other feedback on the written assignments of the course. Each writing fellow would be assigned to three professors for the academic year.

During the first semester, the learning goals (as listed on your handouts) are focused on information literacy and effective communication. The emphasis will be on skills such as gathering and evaluating information, critical reading skills, and effective writing and speaking. In addition to the more purely academic goals, this seminar will also introduce students to the rights and responsibilities of membership in the Albright community. This includes such things as understanding the meaning and value of a liberal arts education, a familiarity with the procedures and policies of Albright, and understanding of disciplinary vs. interdisciplinary thinking.

As for the specific format of the proposed first semester seminar, it is single discipline, topically oriented course which meets five times per week. Of these meetings, at least two will be with the instructor responsible for covering the topic and at least two meetings will be with the writing fellow. The fifth hour, when available, will be for meeting with the student mentor. We used this idea from the Freshman Forum because it was one of the things that our current students really enjoyed about Freshman Forum.

Each section will be linked to two other sections from different divisions. The linked sections will have a common writing fellow and coordinated experience events. Ideally, the subject matter in the linked sections would relate, more-or-less, so the students from the linked sections could begin to appreciate how different disciplines examine particular subjects.

The particular subject matter for the first semester would be up to the individual instructors with a general overarching theme of “**Knowing Self and the World**”, which, as AI pointed out, is the first component of our new general education goals. We intend this to truly be a seminar course and therefore the focus should be on reading, reflective writing and discussion rather than a series of lectures by the instructor. Many of the assignments would be similar to current requirements for English 101 with the exception of the Course Application Plan (CAP). This assignment would require the student to develop a plan which outlines their general education courses for their entire time here at Albright. We believe this will demonstrate to the students the importance of the general

education requirements and why we, as an institution, believe that general education is much more than list of items to be checked off, but rather is a “longitudinal phenomenon” (to borrow AI’s phrase). This CAP will be stored electronically and will be used in the senior capstone which Kennon will discuss later in this presentation.

For the second semester of the Freshman Seminar, the learning goals of information literacy and effective communication remain in place with the addition of the introduction to interdisciplinary and integrative studies. Specifically, we would like the students to be able to identify similarities and differences among different fields of study and to appreciate the diversity of theories and creative expressions within disciplines. To achieve these additional goals, the three instructors who had linked sections the first semester would now combine forces to teach a single larger section in a model similar to the current IDS 100 course. This course would be co-taught with all three professors participating. The course structure would otherwise be the same as the first semester with one writing fellow serving the entire course.

The theme for the second semester would be based on “Ways of Knowing: Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity”. The group of instructors would decide on a topic which, ideally, would compliment the first semester’s topics from the individual sections. The requirements for the second semester parallel the first semester. For example, the second semester would have specific experience events associated with it. There would be a significant writing requirement, and the students would be required to finalize their CAP.

As many of you may have noticed, I skipped over the Interim box on the diagram. In a previous Dean’s Seminar, Tom Brogan mentioned using interim as a requirement somewhere in the general education model, and this may be the most logical place to do just that. We have some ideas concerning use of the interim as outlined in the handout, but would like to hear your input before we finalize this portion of the model.

There are some other important points regarding our proposed model. First off, the first-semester instructor would serve as the student’s first year advisor. In a way, this makes all students alpha concentrators and allows for more contact between the advisor and the student through course time as well as standard advising time. Additionally, the teams of three instructors must work collaboratively on the connections between the courses in the first semester and on designing and implementing a coherent course for the second semester. As we originally proposed this model, students would have the same professor for both the first and second semester, but upon further consideration thought some students may want to change sections after the first semester. This would allow easier scheduling and may give the students more of a sense of ownership of their general education. Finally, departments would be required to provide freshmen seminar instructors based on their FTE faculty and instructors would be required to commit to at least two years of teaching freshmen seminar to provide some continuity in the program.

These are the highlights of our freshmen seminar proposal. Now I will turn it over to Jennifer who will give an overview of the first proposal dealing with the sophomore and junior years.

III- Dr. Koosed: Foundations

Developmentally, “Foundations” is the next step – the introduction to the methods, theories, objects of study, and modes of expression in the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. For this stage in general studies, we have separated out “the arts” from the rest of the humanities in order to preserve the current fine arts requirement.

Students will take one course in the 3 areas that are outside of their major. Each of these courses would be geared toward the general studies student, the non-major, and would have a common set of goals – to introduce the student to the methods, theories, objects of study, and modes of expression of each area – but the specific subject matter would be up to the department and instructor.

This model allows the department to separate out their general studies from their majors if they so desire (example: Sociology may have an intro for general studies which would be a Foundations class and an intro for majors that would be a part of their concentration).

Many courses that are currently offered as General Studies courses could easily be adapted to become a Foundations course. For example, my Monsters in the Bible course touches on religious studies, history, art history, philosophy, and literature – I could easily shape this into an introduction to the way humanities looks at the world.

If a student changes concentrations, they would not need to go back and pick up a Foundations course in their old concentration. If a student is an Alpha student, they could do a Foundations course in all four areas. Some Foundations courses could also count as a major course (double-dipping is allowed in this model) depending on what the department decides.

IV- Dr. Falabella: Divisional Clusters

We are using the term cluster here but we can think of it as a reference to a particular category of courses that represent a division. This alternative dispenses with the Foundations component discussed earlier, but similar to the Foundations layout, we have chosen to breakout the divisions into four parts, separating the fine arts from the humanities. Objectives and goals remain intact in that students will be learning about different disciplines and their approaches to knowledge.

We break out these clusters into two sets, one designated for the sophomore year and one for the junior year. Students would be required to take three classes selected from three of the four clusters of categories in each year, choosing from the three divisions that are outside of their concentration.

In the sophomore year, the focus is on using historical surveys and perspectives for introducing the student to the development of systems of thoughts within contexts

different from their own division. The objective would be to broaden the individual's perspectives by showing transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge, thus integrating the student's experience through shared perspectives. To accomplish this, within each division, two disciplines, with two instructors, would combine historical survey classes that would provide an overview of the subjects being discussed. Although not as comprehensive as a similar course that would be offered to concentrators, each course needs to be more than just a topical treatment of the subject presented, offering enough breadth and depth to give the student an appreciation for the particular discipline.

In the junior year, methodology would be the theme. Students would investigate how methods of analysis and creative expression are developed in the different disciplines. Each of the four divisions would satisfy this theme through techniques that are representative of their respective categories, be that with qualitative or quantitative research, laboratory research, or creative expression. Again, the courses would be specifically earmarked for a general studies student and would not provide the in-depth focus that a concentration course might entail. Nonetheless, similar to the first set of courses offered in the sophomore year, the depth of understanding needs to still provide the student with an appreciation for the significance and relevance of these methods to contemporary modes of understanding and evaluation. These courses would be taught by one instructor.

Format of courses remains similar to current offerings, integrating lectures, discussion, and regular reading and writing assignments.

Each cluster course would integrate/require 3 "experience" events, 2 of which must be "academic" experience events. The academic events could include paper presentations, guest lecturers, etc. within a discipline, or could be common experiences that are developed across the 4 divisions and are thus open to students from different sections. This would give a total of 12 academic experiences. The remaining 6 experience events could be either cultural, artistic, or entertainment.

The divisional cluster alternative looks to achieve the goal of "understanding the world" by providing the historical perspectives with the methodological approaches of the different disciplines, thus giving the student a broader, more complete picture of the coherence of the subjects they study.

V- Dr. Kalouche: Other Requirements

The following requirements were not integrated into any of the model sections proposed so far in such a way that every student would encounter and experience them.

First, as part of our GE goals and the "Understanding the World" rubric, we have included the following "Understanding and employing quantitative and logical reasoning" (second set of goals, third category of skills—out of 5).

If not already fulfilled by students, we are recommending to include in the overall model a “quantitative and logical reasoning” requirement. The term “quantitative and logical reasoning” refers to basic arithmetic and algebraic understanding, graphical data interpretation, and logical reasoning. Courses that typically introduce this kind of reasoning have typically been offered in Advanced Algebra or Calculus, Theoretical and/or Applied Statistics, and Formal or Symbolic Logic. Keep in mind that some cluster courses may include quantitative methods classes (for example, the divisional clusters), but these are not specifically designated as “quantitative and logical reasoning”—rather, such courses could be statistical or ethnographic methods. The former may fulfill the requirement, as would classes in mathematics, or some computer science classes.

The other three recommended requirements are relevant to our third rubric of the GE goals, namely, “Engaging with the World.”

The general description of this rubric, and its most relevant categories, are the following:

“Students will understand cultures as well as the differences within and among them. They will learn different perspectives on ways of living and relating to the world and recognize the importance of social and ethical engagement in a local and global context

- **exploring the history, creative products, beliefs and ideas of different cultures in the United States and around the world**
- **exploring intensively at least one other culture**
- **developing an understanding of ethical values and social and global responsibilities that will inform their engagement with self and world”**

The second recommended requirement is the foreign language requirement. A liberal arts education is not complete without a solid proficiency in another language that is meant as a gateway to another culture and history. The more classes that students takes in a foreign language, the better we prepare them to think differently. We are not proposing to change the three required classes leading to a 201 level proficiency [actually we scrapped a proposal to require 3 courses irrespective of level of proficiency], but as you will see, we are proposing to implement entrance exams/tests so that students could be placed at their optimum level of learning.

The Committee brings you three alternative approaches to how to prepare our students to engage in the world related to the third and fourth requirements, that are inter-connected in many ways: Cross Cultural Understanding and Ethical Values and Social and Global Responsibilities

ALTERNATIVE 1 proposes the designation of courses across the curriculum as fulfilling these two requirements, including courses offered as freshmen seminars, cluster courses, and concentration courses. This would make it easier to students to take courses marked as “Cross Cultural Understanding” and “Ethical Engagement” across their academic career:

ALTERNATIVE 2 proposes the same thing as Alternative 1, but provides more specific criteria of selection and/or development of courses fulfilling these two requirements renamed Cross Cultural Awareness and Global Interdependencies.

Only courses that seriously introduce at least two sets of historically divergent and heterogenous cultural traditions and values, highlighting the singularity, difference, and universality of each respective set of ethical values would be designated as Cross Cultural Awareness courses.

Only courses that seriously introduce contemporary or past forms of interdependencies between traditions, cultures, nations, and peoples across space and time, while highlighting the complex forces bringing about unity and homogeneity through interactions, exchanges, power relations, or shared experiences would be designated as Global Interdependencies courses.

ALTERNATIVE 3 proposes not implementing these two requirements, since the existing liberal arts curriculum and the foreign language requirement, supplemented by experiential learning inevitably fulfill what these requirements aim at, namely Cross Cultural Awareness and Ethical Engagement.

This concludes the 4 major “other requirements” of the GE curriculum model.

However, the committee also determined that to ensure both our vision of academic excellence and the success of our GE curriculum it is essential to have an effective academic placement assessment, and when needed, remedial, preparatory, or developmental classes/programs. Placement assessment tests are widely available, and we need only cater them to our own needs. Non-Credit Remedial or Prep classes (in English, Math, and Computer Science) could be developed by Academic Support in close consultation with departments and faculty. Entrance Assessment or Placement tests are recommended for 1) writing, 2) reading, 3) Quantitative, 4) Analytical, 5) Computer Literacy, and 6) Information Technology.

We also propose that we acquire placement tests for language proficiency and cater them to our needs in consultation with the Department of Foreign Languages and its faculty. Test are recommended for 1) writing, 2) reading, 3) oral comprehension, and 4) oral expression, in order to place students at the appropriate level of proficiency.

VI- Dr. Rice: Senior Seminar Presentation

OBJECTIVES:

We provide two alternatives of what a senior seminar might look like. The objectives of each are essentially the same. In short, both attempt to:

- a) Provide an opportunity for students to practice an integration of general studies skills.
- b) Help the students to integrate their experiential learning and their own particular concentrations with their general studies and to reflect on their interconnection.
- c) Promote a conscious recognition of intellectual growth through general studies.
- d) Continue training in written and oral communication

ALTERNATIVE ONE:

The first alternative has a broad theme such as globalization, a particular year in history, a type of technology or physical object, etc. It is structured as seminar in which each of the students enrolled in the course is considered an expert representing their own discipline. They are required to serve as educator to the other students in the course about how their discipline relates to the topic at hand and are asked to recognize the intersections of the discipline within the complex reality of the theme itself.

On top of these requirements are a series of course assignments that require students to reflect directly on their intellectual growth for the duration of their enrollment. This reflection puts special emphasis on the non-credit experiential components that were required earlier in their academic careers.

(Students are assumed to have completed their experience events as well as some sort of broadly defined extra-curricular learning experience previous to enrolling in this course).

ALTERNATIVE TWO:

Alternative two is quite similar to alternative one on most dimensions. The primary difference being that the “theme based” portion of the course is absent. The course is still structured as a seminar and contains multiple writing assignments, both aimed at creating a reflection upon their tenure at Albright and an integration of the different aspects of their educations, and again, with special emphasis on a broadly defined experiential learning event.

In both alternatives, the primary objective is not to present new information to students, but allow them to practice the knowledge and skills they’ve already obtained in an integrated way. Therefore, in both cases the instructor acts more as a facilitator than a sage.

VII- HANDOUT

Current Requirements	Proposed Model With Foundations and Thematic Clusters
Eng101 and Eng102 (2 courses)	Folded into Freshman seminars with additional writing intensive elements build into the clusters and senior seminar.
Foreign language (Currently 3 courses)	Competency through 201 level with testing for placement or forced placement based on high school transcripts.
Humanities (4 courses)	One course required under Foundations and a minimum of a second required in the Clusters (Many students will actually take more than one in their clusters). Others potentially added to fulfill the “Cross Cultural Understanding” and “Ethical Values and Social and Global Responsibilities” requirements. Humanities are also represented in the freshman seminars and capstone.
Natural Science (1 lab science)	One lab science course required under the Foundations requirement and a second natural science required as part of a thematic cluster. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstones.
Quantitative Reasoning (1 course)	Integrated into the thematic clusters and Foundations courses. Another potentially added as part of “IV. Other Requirements.”
Social Science (2 courses)	One required under Foundations and a least one additional required within Clusters. Others potentially added to fulfill the “Cross Cultural Understanding” and “Ethical Values and Social and Global Responsibilities” requirements. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstone.
Fine Arts (1 course)	One required in Foundations with the option of an additional course in the Thematic Clusters. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstones.
IDS (1 course)	Eliminated, with its learning goals folded into the Freshman seminars, clusters, and senior seminar

Freshman Forum (A non-credit limited duration course)	Folded into freshman seminars
Experiential Learning (16 Experience events required)	Basic requirement unchanged, but frequently linked to Clusters or Freshman Seminars, and a summative reflection on them built into the senior seminars. An additional intensive, but broadly defined experiential learning event also required for graduation (Internship, study abroad, ACRE, Independent study, teaching practicum, etc.)

Current Requirements	Proposed Model With Divisional Clusters
Eng101 and Eng102 (2 courses)	Folded into Freshman seminars with additional writing intensive elements build into the clusters and senior seminar.
Foreign language (Currently 3 courses)	Competency through 201 level with testing for placement or forced placement based on high school transcripts.
Humanities (4 courses)	Two courses required in the divisional clusters and also represented in the freshman seminars and capstone.
Natural Science (1 lab science)	One lab science course and one survey course required under the Divisional Clusters. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstones.
Quantitative Reasoning (1 course)	Integrated into the thematic clusters or required separately.
Social Science (2 courses)	Two required under Divisional Clusters. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstone.
Fine Arts (1 course)	Two required under Divisional Clusters. Also represented in the freshman seminars and senior capstones.
IDS (1 course)	Eliminated, with its learning goals folded into the Freshman seminars, clusters, and senior seminar

<p>Freshman Forum (A non-credit limited duration course)</p>	<p>Folded into freshman seminars</p>
<p>Experiential Learning (16 Experience events required)</p>	<p>Basic requirement unchanged, but frequently linked to Clusters or Freshman Seminars, and a summative reflection on them built into the senior seminars.</p> <p>An additional intensive, but broadly defined experiential learning event also required for graduation (Internship, study abroad, ACRE, Independent study, teaching practicum, etc.)</p>