

General Education Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations for Review

The Committee welcomes your questions about this recommendation and its development. Supporting documents along with a list of the committee members are included. Thank you for your consideration of our efforts.

General Education Ad Hoc Committee Members

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Guide to the Proposal

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Committee Charge

The charge of the General Education Ad Hoc Committee (GEAHC) is to review different proposals and models for reform of General education, or any portion thereof, and to submit a proposal in the form of a report to the Faculty Senate spring semester 2009. The committee is charged with seeking input from the MSU faculty regarding essential skills and outcomes that should be common to all MSU students upon completing their course of study. The committee's purpose in seeking a broader philosophy for the MSU experience is to establish principles to guide the writing of a proposal and report on reform of MSU's current general education program.

Background

This document outlines a plan for defining learning outcomes and incorporating them into the curriculum. The plan that is presented reflects a year of work undertaken by the GEAHC. This committee was convened in spring 2008 because of evidence indicating that the current general education program was not consistent with Vision 2013. Supporting evidence can also be found in the recent Higher Learning Commission self-study.

In order to better understand issues surrounding curriculum changes for general education several committee members attended an AAC&U Gen Ed Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May/June 2008. To further identify with the current state of higher education faculty and the changes needed to strengthen undergraduate education, committee members attended an AAC&U Conference in San Diego, California, April 2008. Developmental work stemming from the AAC&U Institute and Conference, examination of national trends, and other relevant sources were used to aid in the develop of the general education plan which is proposed in this recommendation. This information was used to guide open forum meetings with MSU faculty, staff, and administrators to gather preliminary information about their perspectives on general education outcomes. A survey was developed using the outcome information to assess the top outcome choices among faculty, staff, and administrators. Analysis of this survey and information gathered from all meetings was used to develop the following recommendation.

In addition a binder of reference materials collected during 2008/2009 has been placed in the Library on reserve for evaluation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Faculty Open Forums. Nine open forum sessions provided two methods of data collection regarding faculty opinions about learning outcomes for students. One method of data collection focused on the synthesis of suggestions and outcomes that faculty wrote on index cards during the forum. The second method of data collection consisted of extensive minutes documenting forum dialog.

Both methods provided valuable data about student learning outcomes. In order to maximize faculty input an outcome learning survey was developed. The survey consisted of a 4 X 6 grid listing 24 possible learning outcomes, drawn from the open forums. The survey allowed

respondents to add additional outcomes and comments. A copy of the survey is provided in the appendix.

The survey was made available to faculty, staff, and administration. Faculty survey data were collected primarily during college or department meetings by committee members (n = 86). There were 23 staff and 12 administrative responses. Data were tabulated by counting the number of responses indicated for each learning outcome. This strategy was adopted because not all respondents limited themselves to 10 choices.

Survey Results. Faculty responses are presented in Table 1. In general, all learning outcome categories are important to various faculty. There are, however, distinct categories that faculty consider to be important. More than 70% of faculty included critical thinking, written communication skills, problem solving, and oral communication skills as very important outcomes for students. Between 50 % - 69% of faculty considered information literacy, ethical and social responsibility, skills for lifelong learning skills, and ability to adapt skills to be important. All other categories were selected by less than 50% of faculty.

Staff responses for student learning outcomes are presented in Table 2. More than 70% of staff identified written communication skills, problem solving ability, critical thinking, oral communication skills, lifelong learning skills, and ethical and social responsibility as very important outcomes for students. Between 50% - 69% of staff selected the ability to adapt skills, information literacy, collaborative ability, and civic engagement to be important. All other categories were selected by less than 50% of staff.

Administrative responses for student learning outcomes are presented in Table 3. More than 70% of administrators identified critical thinking, written communication skills, oral communication skills, ethical and social responsibility, problem solving ability, and information literacy as very important outcomes from students. Between 50% - 69% of administrators selected the ability to adapt skills, lifelong learning skills, and historical synthesis to be important. All other categories were selected by less than 50% of administrators.

Qualitative Responses. Faculty, staff and administrators agreed that certain learning outcomes are of high importance for all students. These learning outcomes are critical thinking, problem solving, written and oral communication, information literacy, ethical and social responsibility, lifelong learning skills, and the ability to adapt skills. Although these are the most highly selected learning outcomes, it should be remembered that various faculty rated all 24 outcomes to be important to lesser extents. Thus it can be argued that all outcomes should potentially receive some consideration when developing a plan for student learning when outcomes are the primary focus.

Table 1. Faculty Responses for Student Learning Outcome Categories

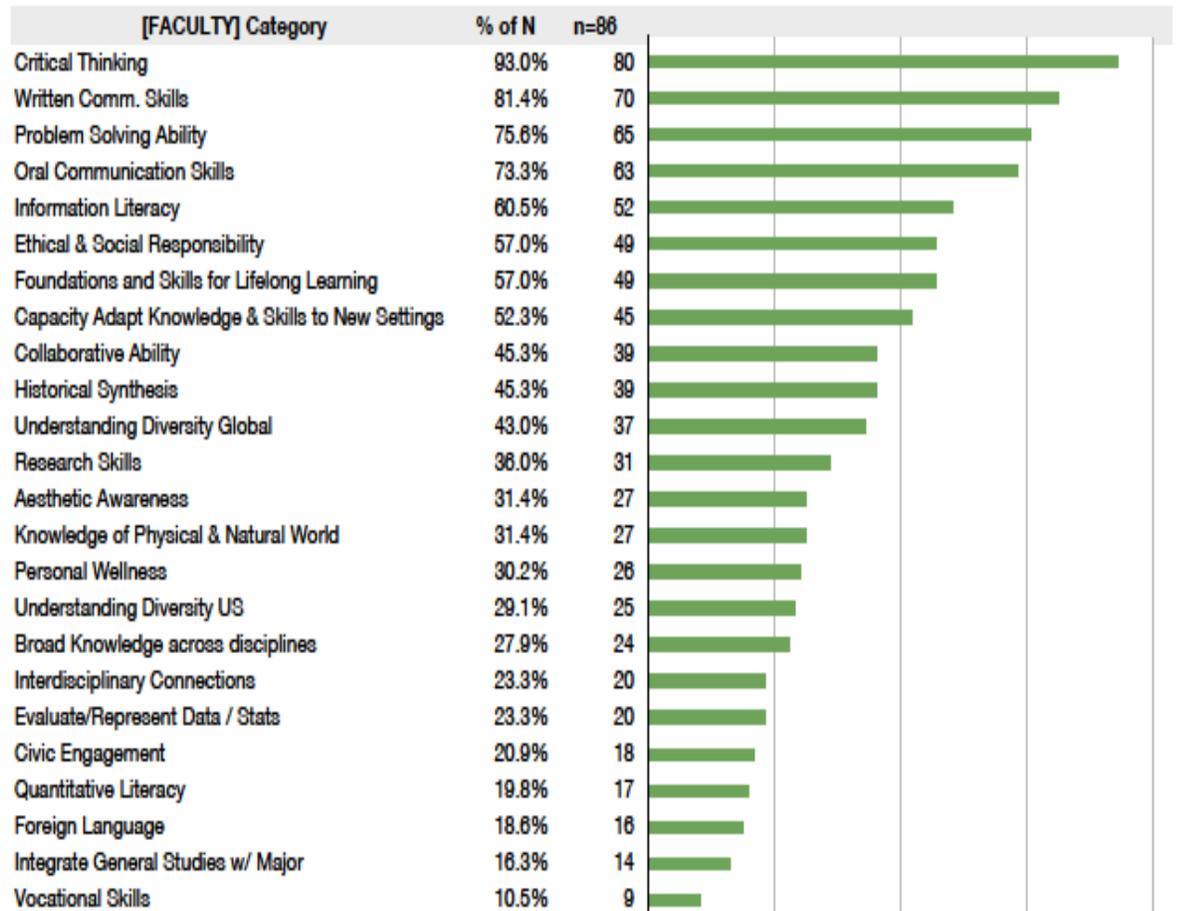


Table 2. Staff Responses for Student Learning Outcome Categories

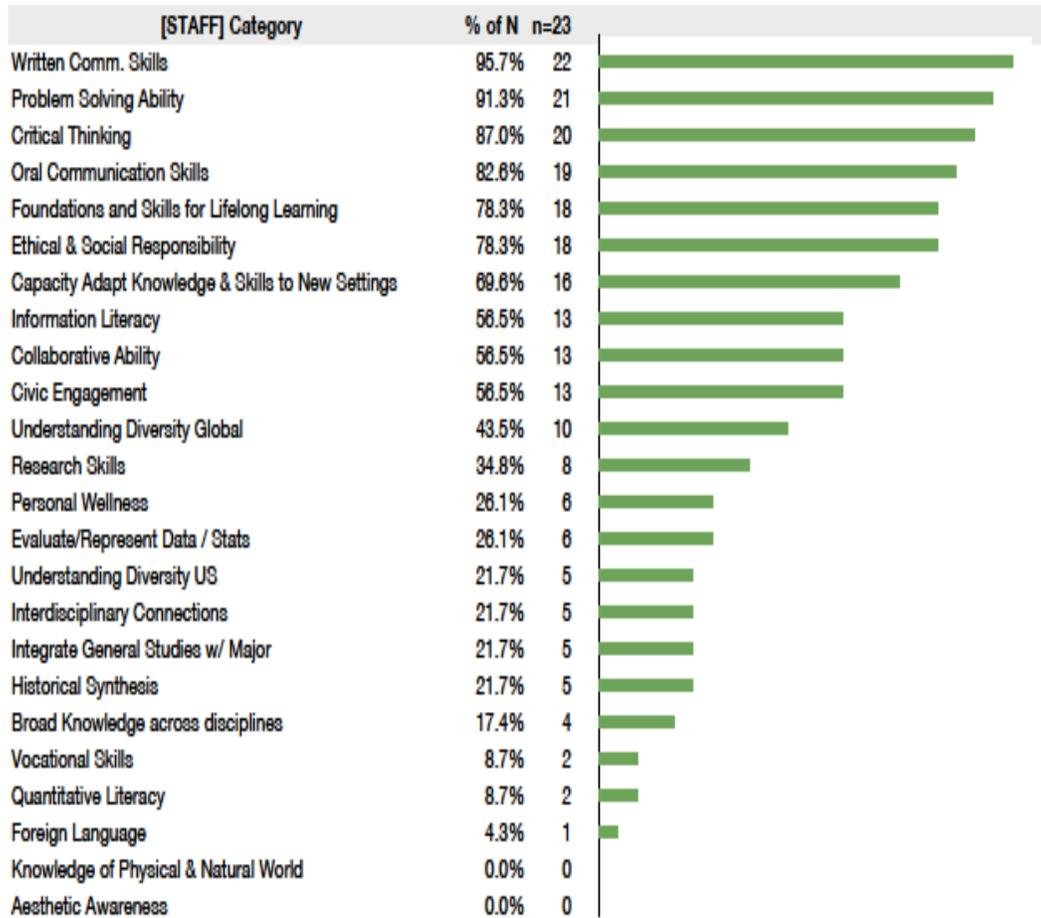
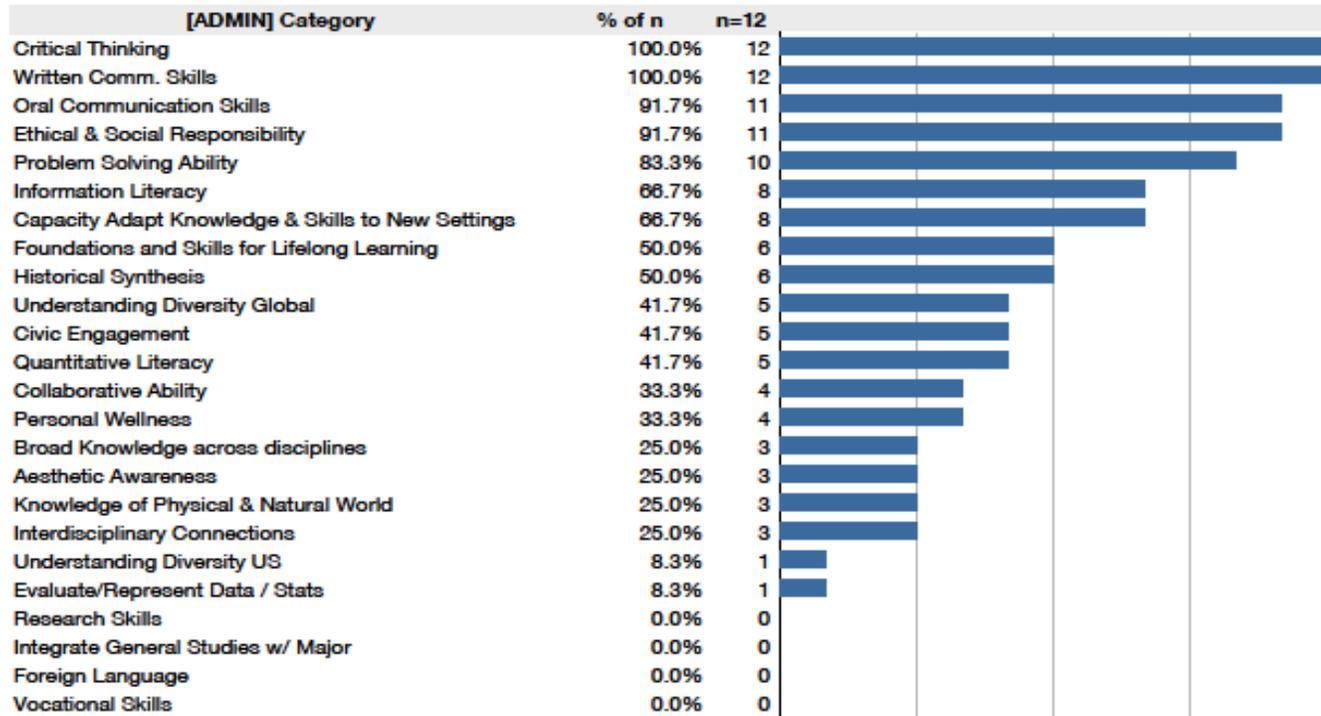


Table 3. Administration Responses for Student Learning Outcome Categories



Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The GEAHC recommends the Faculty Senate adopt the following philosophy and associated student outcomes to govern MSU's General Education program. In response to the Faculty Senate's charge, this recommendation directly addresses the need to establish overarching principles and goals for general education. In addition, it serves as a model to guide the campus in rethinking the common learning experiences of all MSU students in the course of the entire undergraduate experience.

Philosophy for MSU Common Undergraduate Outcomes

Overview: Minot State University helps people appreciate life and learning and contribute meaningfully to the lives of others. The objective of the general education program is to support MSU's core purpose by developing in each student:

A broad knowledge of content across subjects and an understanding of how that knowledge is produced.

The ability to draw upon that knowledge and upon diverse cultural, social and historical perspectives.

The capacity to make connections and solve problems in new settings.

In addition, MSU's undergraduate philosophy requires students to realize these objectives through academic experiences in courses and in the community, through development of critical, intellectual and practical skills, and through cultural experiences that provide a richer understanding of diversity and of social and personal responsibility.

Detailed Program

Area I: Modes of Inquiry and Core Content

MSU students should develop a solid understanding of how different disciplines produce knowledge (epistemologies) and should demonstrate a broad understanding of the core content associated with and produced by different disciplines. Such broad knowledge is indispensable to the liberally educated student and to responding to the diverse and unpredictable challenges and situations any graduate will face in his or her lifetime.

Three essential areas commonly identified by the MSU Community are:

1. Knowledge of human cultures and of how to study, compare and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives.

2. Knowledge of the physical and natural world and of how to produce and apply that knowledge in a variety of settings.
3. Knowledge of common and diverse historical experiences and of how to apply historical synthesis to inform decisions and understanding of the contemporary world.

GEAHC recommends that departments currently responsible for general education courses in each of these core areas propose a variety of entry-level courses, first-year seminars, and upper-division courses to satisfy Area I.

Area II: Common Analytic Capacities and Practical Skills

Effective student learning in all disciplines and its application in a variety of careers and community settings requires comfort and competence in a range of intellectual, cognitive and practical skills. MSU graduates should demonstrate fluency in each of the following areas, all which contribute directly to the capacity to adapt knowledge and skills to new situations.

Capacities identified by the MSU Community as essential to student success are:

1. Critical thinking.
2. Problem solving.
3. Information literacy.
4. Quantitative literacy.
5. Oral and written communication.
6. Collaboration.

GEAHC recommends that departments propose a range of courses (first-year and advanced) whose primary focus emphasizes one or more of these skills identified in Area II. In addition, certain areas such as oral and written communication may need to have specific requirements defined, and the information literacy outcome may be introduced in the first year, expanded upon in discipline-specific courses, and reinforced throughout the curriculum, in collaboration with librarians.

Area III: Personal & Social Responsibility

MSU students should actively develop life-long skills related to the physical, mental, emotional, and social health of the individual and to the betterment of the community. As individuals all undergraduates should examine behaviors related to personal well-being, develop interests and passions in intellectually stimulating activities beyond the selected major or profession, and explore and consider the importance of human emotion and ethical reasoning. In addition, MSU students should actively interact and collaborate with colleagues, seek ways to contribute to the

broader community, and reflect on the experience of learning and living within a diverse community.

While no one course can ensure this growth, MSU faculty have identified three overlapping areas that define a common experience:

1. Personal Wellness
2. Civic Engagement
3. Ethical & Social Responsibility

GEAHC recommends that departments propose a range of courses, including first year seminars, which address the content aspects of Area III, but also seek to incorporate collaborative, philosophical, and diversity elements across their offerings. These should include service learning, internships, and/or other community projects. Beyond the formal classroom MSU must continue both to provide a climate and space for students to celebrate their own cultures and to grow a campus rich in opportunities for students to experience and reflect upon the unfamiliar.

AREA IV: Interconnecting Perspectives:

Our world is complex. MSU students should demonstrate a nuanced understanding of complex social issues, decisions and consequences. They should be able to draw upon and consider an increasingly diverse set of scientific, historical, cultural, and emotional perspectives to frame their arguments and should employ multiple ways of thinking about problems (Areas I-III) to both evaluate and respond to alternative viewpoints.

Essential areas identified by the MSU community:

1. Global and United States Diversity
2. Intercultural Knowledge and Competence
3. Aesthetic and Cultural Awareness

GEAHC recommends that Area IV include MSU's current diversity course requirements. In addition, MSU students should demonstrate some sort of holistic experience. These might include intensive foreign language study, study abroad experiences, or research in the region or community designed to enhance understanding of different cultural perspectives. Work produced in MSU's emerging interdisciplinary fields, such as those that cut across science and society, environment and history, business and international cultures, or other similar perspectives may also satisfy this requirement. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of Area IV, GEAHC strongly recommends the Faculty Senate consider creating a standing committee to define and manage projects, requirements and assessment in this area.

Recommendation 2:

The GEAHC recommends the faculty senate consider the following suggestions to implement the philosophy outlined in Recommendation 1. This will require a new charge to GEAHC and/or the General Education committee to design a general education program that assigns courses and specific requirements to the areas outlined in the broader philosophy.

1. Freeze the existing list of general education courses and the recertification process during 2009-2010.
2. Direct the General Education committee and the GEAHC members to focus exclusively on convening faculty from different disciplines to draft a comprehensive program of study and requirements to operationalize the philosophy outlined in Recommendation 1.
3. Direct the General Education committee and the GEAHC members to consider ways to distribute courses that satisfy elements of the philosophy outlined in recommendation 1 across all four years of the undergraduate experience.
4. Present a detailed first draft general education plan to the Faculty Senate at its first meeting in January, 2010.
5. Outline a mechanism to map MSU's new requirements to the NDUS system to accommodate transfer students.

Recommendation 3:

The GEAHC recommends that the faculty senate adopt a long-term policy and strategy to invite individual departments to incorporate the philosophy outlined in Recommendation 1 into their degree programs and majors.

Recommendation 4:

The GEAHC recommends that upon finalization of a new "general education" program, most likely in the spring semester of 2010, that the Faculty Senate directs the General Education committee and the Academic Assessment Committee to coordinate assessment of student achievement in each of the four areas defined in Recommendation 1. While the details of this assessment strategy first require that GEAHC and the General Education committee develop the precise requirements for each area, GEAHC recommends four general principles: 1. For discipline specific areas (primarily those in Area I) assessment should focus on one or two aspects most directly relevant to the course. This is a change away from the current GE model in which all courses must meet all strands. 2. A number of items in Area II cut across disciplines and student mastery may need to be measured using a combination of measures such as the CLA exam, student writing portfolios or other suitable measures, some which may require coordination from the student's major discipline. 3. Area III requires students to demonstrate evidence of community service, an internship, research beyond the classroom, a teaching experience, or other evidence related to personal and social responsibility and to the common good. One fundamental measure of student accomplishment in this area is evidence from and reflections on a service learning experience. 4. Students should be able to demonstrate competency in Area IV through a variety of experiences. Examples might include intensive foreign language study, study abroad experiences, or research in the region or community

designed to enhance understanding of different cultural perspectives. Work produced in MSU's emerging interdisciplinary fields, such as those that cut across science and society, environment and history, business and international cultures, or other similar perspectives may also satisfy this requirement.

Connection to Vision 2013

The work of the GEAHC aligns with and supports the core value identified in Vision 2013 that Minot State University is committed to "teaching and learning with excellence, integrity, and engagement." The faculty's development and adoption of essential learning outcomes has been a focus of GEAHC activities this year. Alignment of curriculum and teaching strategies with those outcomes, a process that would be undertaken in the next phase of the committee's work, will facilitate the raising of expectations for student work and their engagement in the learning process.

Three of the Vision 2013 Strategies are directly supported by the work of the GEAHC. The first is Strategy One: Create and promote a distinctive mission, vision and premier institutional character based on curricula and services known for high quality, engagement, relationship to place, and the integration of knowledge, theory, and practice. As evidenced in the forum discussions sponsored by the GEAHC, faculty place high value on student learning experiences that integrate content knowledge with theory and allow students to demonstrate skill in practice. Adoption of essential learning outcomes and the alignment of curriculum with those outcomes will facilitate the integration of knowledge, theory, and practice at high levels.

Strategy Two: Fostering engaged learning and place for the benefit of students, is the second strategy supported by the work of the GEAHC. The alignment of general education coursework with essential learning outcomes will allow faculty to determine benchmarks and specific course objectives that support high-quality teaching and learning. Faculty discussions revealed that an MSU student's first year experiences must help the student to understand the level of commitment and engagement necessary to be successful. To that end students must become aware of the essential learning outcomes and their purpose. They must also learn that while they may not enter the university setting with high levels of performance in of any of those outcomes, they will grow in mastery throughout their academic tenure at Minot State University.

The third strategy supported by the work of the GEAHC is Strategy Five: Focusing on student success and future achievements. Priority three, "to develop methods to emphasize ways to teach, inspire, and model for students how to acquire knowledge as well as the critical thinking, problem solving, communication, life skills, and people skills necessary for a successful and meaningful career, continuation in graduate school, and the pursuit of other professional directions," mirrors the essential learning outcomes identified by faculty in the GEAHC survey and outlined in this document.

Appendix

General Education Ad Hoc Committee Survey

The following is a composite list of learning outcomes critical to every MSU graduate as proposed by faculty during the first semester of open forum activity. The next task is to refine this list as we move toward our March goal of submitting a report to Faculty Senate that recommends a course of action for MSU General Education. Please circle your top ten. Prioritization is not necessary. Feel free to suggest new categories and/or add comments in the space provided.

Please indicate your status:	Faculty	Staff	Student	Administration
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Critical Thinking (mental processes of discernment, analysis, and evaluation)	Quantitative Literacy	Aesthetic Awareness	Historical Synthesis (understanding the global and national past in reference to the present)	Collaborative Ability	Problem Solving Ability
Civic Engagement	Ethical and Social Responsibility	Understand Diversity in the United States	Understand Global Diversity	Foreign Language	Information Literacy (ability to effectively access, evaluate, select, and use information)
Oral Communication Skills	Written Communication Skills	Broad Knowledge across Disciplines	Ability to Evaluate and Represent Data and Statistics	Vocational Skills	Ability to Integrate General Studies with the Major
Capacity to Adapt Knowledge and Skills to New Settings	Personal Wellness	Interdisciplinary Connections	Research Skills	Knowledge of the Physical and Natural World	Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning

Feedback - Please add comments or additional categories.