

Curriculum Review Best Practices:
Toward a Synthesis of the Gen Ed Review Process at
The University of Denver
Prepared by the Academic Planning Committee of Faculty Senate

This document provides a review of the General Education Review process leading to DU's current Common Curriculum and suggested best practices gleaned from the process. A short survey of department chairs, interviews of General Education Review Committee members, various academic department chairs, and dissenters from approval for the new Common Curriculum were conducted for this review. The following notes were created to provide guidance for future endeavors of this nature. The Academic Planning Committee would like to thank all who gave time in reflection on this process.

Summary of General Education Review

- I. Summary of how discussions and feedback was solicited from faculty in the 2007-2009 review process:
 - a) A Gen. Ed. review committee was set up by the Provost that included faculty representatives of all academic divisions, two representatives from the APC of faculty senate and several administrative personnel. Luc Beaudoin was appointed chair of the committee and convener of meetings.
 - b) Email questions were sent out to all faculty soliciting a larger set of input around 4 questions regarding the then current General Education format
 - (1) What role should DU's general education curriculum play in achieving the aims of DU's Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes? (The Outcomes are available at <http://www.du.edu/assessment/UGoutcomesfinal.pdf>.)
 - (2) How well does the current general education structure achieve these aims?
 - (3) What could be changed to the current general education structure to make it better achieve those goals?
 - (4) What is the relationship of the major to the general education curriculum?
 - c) Emails continued to flow in first months and were filtered according to need and who might best consider the feedback.
 - d) Portfolio Site established (still open): All faculty had access to the work being done and posted on Portfolio
 - e) Feedback forwarded along to entire committee when requested by sender
 - f) Some emails were not of content nature so were not forwarded
 - g) Most feedback was received "in the first few months," and seemed to come to a halt 6 months in, until Dean Saitta offered his counter proposal in winter 2009
 - h) All conversations and ideas reportedly were discussed openly with the entire committee; no side sub-groups

- i) Meetings were sought with each department to solicit feedback and discuss any ideas, although not all made use of this opportunity
 - j) Open meeting was held for faculty to discuss final product; not many attended.
- II. Praises of the Process:
- a) Committee had strong faculty presence/make-up.
 - b) Many faculty members trusted the committee that was assigned to do the hard work of assessing and recommending changes.
 - c) There were many opportunities for faculty to view documents, ask questions and submit ideas.
 - d) Overall, being kept informed of the review process and changes to the curriculum depended on committee representatives actively talking about it in their spheres of representation.
 - e) Faculty Senate representatives from specific departments kept departments “up-to-date on developments”.
- III. Concerns about the Process—Some departments and some faculty reported:
- a) The specific concerns of their department were “dismissed”
 - b) Gen Ed Committee had “capitulated” or gave in to the concerns of some programs or departments over others. Particular concern expressed over the high focus of Writing Center and Languages and Literature in final plan.
 - c) Self-interests of representatives influenced review and reform
 - d) Some departments claimed they “were not officially told what was being considered”
 - e) Lack of debate/discussion over the counter-proposal put forth
 - f) Larger concerns over staffing—which depend on how the new curriculum is patterned—were relegated to specific departments to settle and not fully understood
 - g) Perception that the new curriculum was “presented” to faculty rather than as an engaged discussion
 - h) Over-representation of particular departments or units, and that specific representatives selected were not as knowledgeable about Gen Ed reform practices as others had hoped.
- IV. Specific suggestions for better process in the future around Gen. Ed reform:
- a) Make sure that faculty and administrators have a way to see what the committee is doing, and that they have a way to get in contact with people to ask what's going on; Not all were aware of Portfolio; **Over communicate.**
 - b) Produce an ongoing update report or newsletter.
 - c) Visit departments, divisions, and schools at least twice, whether they ask or not. Just ask to come: Minimum of 1x in beginning and 1x toward end
 - d) APC should coordinate with the Gen Ed Committee’s work, specifically how it communicates with faculty; give ongoing updates at Faculty Senate.

- e) Make/Continue researching educational curriculum at competing institutions as an ongoing part of future processes. Continuous improvement/evaluation.

V. Summary of Best Practices Suggested for Future Committees of this Nature

(These suggestions can provide guidance for departments and divisions to consider in their own internal curricular reviews and revisions):

- a) Involve the Academic Planning Committee more strategically and actively in an *advise and consent* role for future academic initiatives of such far reaching nature.
- b) Keep a strong constitution of faculty on any academic review committee; administrators are important for some key functions, but faculty need to make up the majority of the committee.
- c) Make appointments to committee transparent and clear to all.
- d) Create a timeline with a strategy for work and disseminate it widely so all will know the process and expected time frame with contacts for input; then over communicate it.
- e) Develop communication mechanisms using Portfolio, emails, face to face meetings, department and division visits making sure reciprocity of ideas is clear.
- f) Plan and stage open dialogue of difference so several sides are heard before final drafts are created; where there is dissent, give time to work on how to incorporate concerns more actively and transparently.
- g) Continue ongoing assessment and evaluation of processes used to make change, adding to these best practices as shared ideas emerge.