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32 Update: Revised General Education Model Explained

University of Northern Iowa. General Education Re-envisioning Committee.

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Dear Colleagues,

After gathering feedback from campus and engaging in extensive conversations about it, the General Education Re-envisioning Committee is requesting your feedback on a revised proposal for the General Education program's structure. You can find the revised structure attached to this email, as well as within the survey you can access through this link asking you to [provide your feedback](#) on the structure.

The survey will be available between now and Friday, February 28th at noon. Please continue reading for a summary of the committee's progress since the last update, along with an explanation of the changes made from earlier drafts.

In the fall semester, the General Education Re-envisioning Committee held listening sessions, revised the draft of the model based on those listening sessions, and then met with the College Senates of CHAS, COE, CSBS, and CBA, several academic departments, student representatives, and other groups interested in meeting with the committee. Those meetings went into early December.

As the committee began the spring semester, it focused on incorporating feedback from various groups on campus into the proposal. Specifically, the committee listened for common themes and concerns and for those concerns that resonated strongly with the committee. Based on the feedback, the committee made several changes to the model presented to campus in the fall. In addition, the committee recognized a need to offer explanations of some elements of the proposal.

An explanation of the proposal. The proposal incorporates the student learning outcomes approved by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2019. The committee sought a way to accomplish three things: 1) Address the learning outcomes approved by the Faculty Senate; 2) Ensure that these learning outcomes would be assessed; and 3) Ensure students will receive a broad education. The committee believes that the following proposal will provide a means to accomplish each of these.

The proposal has three tiers. Each tier has several boxes. The student outcomes in the boxes are those that would be assessed for courses in that box. The committee believes that many courses may cover more outcomes than those included in a given box. For instance, **all** courses should develop critical thinking skills, but that the programmatic assessment of critical thinking only needs to occur at a few key points. Many courses will likely develop communication skills. However, most courses will not conduct assessment on those learning outcomes. In addition, the boxes in each tier correspond to a 3- or 4-credit hour course.

Tier 1. This tier focuses on the outcomes most consistently identified as most important in surveys and listening sessions. Those outcomes were critical thinking, communication (writing, speaking, and collaboration), and quantitative reasoning. Diversity and inclusion are embedded in Tier 1 because during listening sessions faculty and students expressed desire for our students to be exposed to these ideas early in their time at UNI. The committee believes that all of these outcomes are essential to success at UNI. Students would be encouraged to complete this tier in their first year at UNI. (Minimum of 9 hours).

Tier 2. This tier focuses on the remaining outcomes not specifically addressed and assessed in Tier 1. The tier also seeks to maintain breadth within the general education program. Departments would be allowed to submit courses to any boxes they wish. However, a course should only be included in one

box. Feedback from the most recent survey and listening sessions led the committee to believe that a single course focused exclusively on diversity issues was not the best way to address such issues. The result is a recommendation that diversity be addressed as part of the human condition and be taught from both a domestic and international perspective. The committee foresees that courses in this tier would likely include many opportunities for faculty to lead study abroad courses. (Minimum of 16 hours).

Tier 3. This tier invites faculty to develop a series of three courses around a common theme or topic. The series of courses is an attempt to teach students that the world is complex and that it cannot be understood solely from the perspective of any one discipline. If students take only one course on a complex topic, they will be exposed to only one approach to the topic. They may leave the class thinking that they are well informed, but the fact is that they will not be. A multidisciplinary approach to a complex topic will expose students to different perspectives. This will have three beneficial effects: 1. Students will have a more well-rounded understanding of the topic; 2. Students may come to realize that it is important to seek multiple viewpoints on complex issues; and 3. Students might even begin to understand that in the face of complexity, humility is the only proper attitude. The committee felt that three courses would be sufficient to expose students to different perspectives but also would allow for sufficient flexibility for the development of the series of the courses. The only limitations on the series of courses are: 1. The courses must cover the learning outcomes of communication (speaking and writing), critical thinking, and any other two learning outcomes; and 2. The courses must come from multiple disciplines. Should a student not complete the series of three courses, they must complete a total of three courses from Tier 2 and/or Tier 3.

There are a couple of other items the committee believes is important to understand about the proposal. First, the committee believes that courses taken within the general education program may also count toward minors and majors, much as they do now. Second, the committee anticipates that a course may be in both Tier 2 and Tier 3. However, a student would not be able to count the same course as satisfying both the Tier 2 and Tier 3 requirements.

Finally, the committee believes we are nearing the end of this stage of the process. The committee hopes to have a final proposal to the Faculty Senate when we return from Spring Break. Following this survey, the committee will continue to receive feedback through consultations with the Faculty Senate, college senates, departments, students, advisors, and other interested groups.

We appreciate your feedback.

Sincerely,
The General Education Re-Envisioning Committee

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