

Date: August 10, 2005
To: UMBC Campus Community
From: Arthur T. Johnson, Provost
Ed Orser, Chair, Undergraduate Council and the Interim
General Education Committee

In November, 2003, a memo from the Provost addressing general education stated:

From its founding, UMBC has had as its goal to offer an outstanding undergraduate experience to its students while building its graduate and research programs. This ideal has been reiterated time after time in UMBC's Middle States self-studies and planning activities, including those of the Honors University Task Force and the Planning Leadership Team. UMBC's Strategic Framework for 2016 reaffirms our goal of providing a distinctive undergraduate education to our students. One means of giving UMBC's undergraduate education distinction is to give UMBC's general education curriculum purpose and meaning understood by all, and to align the curriculum with current thinking about student learning at the undergraduate level consistent with Middle States and other accrediting organizations' emphases.

After an extensive review of General Education at UMBC over the past two years, the campus is set to implement the revised General Education Program (GEP), effective in the Fall semester 2007. The changes are relatively modest, but they make significant strides to articulate, enhance, and clarify UMBC's General Education Program.

The principal changes are the following:

1. The General Education Program now has clear Catalog statements on a) the guidelines for each of the distribution and writing requirements and b) the ways in which they address functional competencies (both statements attached). All GEP courses must satisfy the criteria outlined in the GEP guidelines AND at least one of the functional competencies.

The syllabus is one opportunity to explain to students the value of general education. Therefore, each general education course to be approved must have a syllabus that identifies the course as a GEP course, and explicitly addresses the distribution and competency areas it fulfills.

2. In addition to Freshman Composition (Eng100), all students must complete a Writing Intensive course. Courses designated WI engage students in writing as a form of critical inquiry and scholarly research within the context of an academic field and meet the other criteria outlined in the WI Guidelines (attached). The WI course may count for the student's major, a GEP requirement, or an elective.
3. The Language and Culture requirements have been separated. ALL students must take a Language through the 201 level (or demonstrate proficiency at that level); in addition, all B.A. students will take 2 Culture courses; B.S. students will take 1 Culture course (the reduction due to the higher total credit numbers for B.S. degrees). The Language/Culture requirement proved to be the most complicated and confusing element of the GFR system for student understanding, advising, and transcript evaluation. The Culture course requirement retains the original intention

of broadening the horizons of UMBC students through exposure to subject matter whose principal focus extends beyond the borders of the United States; Culture courses may also address the multi-cultural perspectives of global experience and provide inter-cultural and comparative approaches to cultural study.

4. In the Arts/Humanities and Social Science categories students will continue to take three 3 courses each, but the new stipulation is simply that they must be in at least two academic areas (rather than the previous pattern of two in one area, one in a second). This will provide students greater flexibility, while assuring that they are exposed to two or three fields in these distribution categories.

The Fall 2007 implementation date requires that much of the work to put the elements of the new GEP in place must be completed by Fall 2006, thereby allowing adequate time for catalog publication of the requirements and course designations, changes in student service systems, and articulation consultation.

Tasks for 2005-6 will include the following:

1. Establishment of the new General Education Committee (composed of five faculty, representing the diverse requirement areas, and the chair of the Undergraduate Council; plus student and staff members).
2. Departmental submission of courses for GEP approval, including a) existing GFR courses, as appropriate (with brief documentation regarding compliance with the revised guidelines), and b) new or existing courses proposed for GEP. Special attention will need to be given to provision of courses addressing the General Education needs of students, including lower level foundational courses, selected appropriate upper level courses, and courses in areas in need of expanded offerings, particularly in the Culture category. In addition, departments will be asked to submit courses proposed for Writing Intensive (WI) requirement designation.
3. GEP courses need to be made available for students throughout the class schedule periods, including the time after 5:30 p.m. The deans will work with department chairs to assure that students have full opportunity to complete GEP requirements, in keeping with the Regents' efficiency and economy policies.

As you know, the new General Education Program is the result of two years of review and deliberation involving the Provost and a broadly representative faculty committee. The comprehensive initial report was approved by the Faculty Senate in May 2004, and that body received follow-up implementation reports in the Fall and Spring semesters, 2004-5.

We look forward to your continued cooperation and support as UMBC moves toward implementation of its new General Education Program.