

General Education Committee Report
WKU Colonnade Program – General Education Revision
(February 2012)

The General Education Committee (GEC) endorses the WKU Colonnade Program. We believe it to be an improvement over the current General Education plan that will improve students' intellectual experiences and achieve its stated learning outcomes.

A. Background.

1. The last general education revision took place in 2000/1. The Senate voted on whether to adopt or reject the entire revision proposal. The motion put forward at the first reading (December 2000) of that revision read:

“The Report from the Task Force on General Education is the result of a lengthy consultation and revision process. After its own review of the report, the University Senate General Education Committee has decided it is important to preserve the integrity of the report. Therefore, we suggest that the Senate treat the report as they would a proposed new program, when after questions and discussion, the program is either approved or it is sent back for revisions.

Therefore, the General Education Committee proposes that the University Senate adopt the following special rule:

The University Senate shall debate the Report of the General Education Task Force as a whole, discussing it section by section as long as the assembly desires, but no amendments to the report shall be accepted from the floor. At the end of the discussion, the Senate shall vote on the report as a whole. A yes vote will signal approval of the report, a no vote will send the report back to the Task Force for further revision.”

2. The General Education Review Task Force (“Task Force”) was formed by Provost/VPAA Barbara Burch in 2008. Between fall 2008 and October 2011, The Task Force undertook a systematic review of Western Kentucky University’s General Education program. The Task Force completed a report, the Report of the General Education Review Task Force, recommending that the current General Education program be replaced by the WKU Colonnade Program. The Task Force finalized its Report, which includes the architecture of the WKU Colonnade Program, and presented it to the University Senate’s General Education Committee (GEC) in October 2011.

3. The GEC reviewed the Task Force Report between September 2011 and February 2012. During its review, the GEC solicited formal and informal feedback from faculty and administrators throughout the University community. In response to feedback and in consultation with the Task Force, which has voting representatives on the 2011-12 GEC, the GEC concluded that several minor changes to the Task Force-proposed WKU Colonnade Program rules are warranted as the program moves forward. The rule changes are:

A. The World Language Proficiency guideline will read: “Admitted students are expected to demonstrate language proficiency at the ‘novice mid’ level before completing 60 hours of coursework. Additional courses may be taken to meet this proficiency. Students who transfer to WKU with an AA or AS degree, or are “Fully Certified” or “Core Certified”

according to the new Transfer Agreement, will be exempt from the World Language Proficiency requirement.

B. The guideline on the number of WKU Colonnade Program hours students must earn before taking “Connections” courses will read: “Although they may be used with a major or minor program, Connections courses are upper-division classes designed for the general student population, and should be taken after students have completed 21 hours of WKU Colonnade Program coursework or achieved junior status.”

C. The following statement will be added to the WKU Colonnade Program rules: “WKU Colonnade Program requirements do not apply to Associate Degree programs.”

The GEC voted repeatedly and unanimously to approve the Task Force report, the WKU Colonnade Plan included in the Report, and the rule changes noted above. The GEC considers the rule changes to be integral to the WKU Colonnade Program included in the Task Force report.

The GEC believes that the WKU Colonnade Program should be considered as a coherent program rather than as a menu of courses and requirements. The GEC will recommend that the Task Force Report and the WKU Colonnade Program it contains (including GEC rule changes) be voted on by the Senate as a whole using the same rules used during voting on the 2000/1 general education reform.

B. Discussion of GEC Responses to Feedback and Lingering Implementation Issues

There are lingering implementation issues that must be addressed, as the Task Force’s report admits. Also, in the last several months a number of questions, issues, and objections have been raised formally and informally. The GEC believes that lingering issues and the questions and concerns raised to date are not serious enough to delay approval of the WKU Colonnade Program. The GEC has considered them and responds as follows.

1. Some majors believe that 39 hours is too many for the proposed general education program. The GEC believes that the number of hours in the proposed program is appropriate given the goals of the program. The proposed program compares favorably to general education programs at other universities. Furthermore, the proposed Program is five credit hours less than the current General Education scheme.

2. Faculty members and administrators worry that transfer students might have too much difficulty meeting the World Languages Proficiency requirement, especially given the statewide 30 hour transfer agreement. The GEC agrees and crafted a rule amendment stating that students who transfer to WKU will be exempt from the World Languages Proficiency requirement.

3. Faculty members have many questions and express concerns about the upper-level “Connections” course category. Some feel that it is not clear what kinds of courses could be offered in the category. Others feel that it will be difficult for some departments to offer “Connections” courses if there are no prerequisite courses allowed. The GEC believes that the “Connections” courses will be useful and valuable for all students and that concerns about the “Connections” category can be assuaged by educating faculty and providing guidance about how courses for the category might be conceived and implemented.

4. Some majors worry that it will be difficult for their students to complete their major requirements in a timely fashion and/or complete honors requirements if they are required to earn 24 hours of general education before taking “Connections” courses. The GEC agrees but believes that sequencing the core curriculum is necessary to maintain the viability of the “Connections” courses. The GEC crafted a rule change stating that the prerequisite for “Connections” courses will be revised to read, “Connections courses are upper-division classes designed for the general student population, and should be taken after students have completed 21 hours of WKU Colonnade Program coursework or achieved junior status.”

5. Faculty pose questions about how the learning outcomes for the WKU Colonnade Program were developed. The Task Force developed the learning outcomes to reflect the state-mandated “LEAP” (“Liberal Education and America's Promise”) standards for general education. The GEC agreed that the LEAP learning outcomes are desirable and can be achieved by implementing the WKU Colonnade Program.

7. Faculty members wonder what will happen to the current general education requirements if the proposed program is approved. We will recommend that the Senate, if it approves the WKU Colonnade Program, close the current general education program to new courses or revisions.

8. Faculty members express concern that the proposal does not address general education in Associate Degree programs. The GEC agrees and drafted a statement for the WKU Colonnade Plan description that makes it clear that the WKU Colonnade Program as presented does not apply to Associate Degree students/programs. Also, the GEC will suggest that the Provost assemble a task force to review Associate Degree general education and propose appropriate revisions.

9. Several faculty members at campus forums expressed concern that the proposed WKU Colonnade Program rules are too restrictive for faculty and will not allow students enough choice in coursework. The GEC disagrees and feels that the WKU Colonnade Program will provide a flexible architecture that will allow faculty to offer a wide variety of courses for students to choose from. Furthermore, students will gain more flexibility and choice in coursework in and outside their majors if the WKU Colonnade Program is adopted, since the Program is five credit hours smaller than the current General Education framework.

10. Faculty members and administrators express concerns and have many questions about implementation of the WKU Colonnade Program. The GEC reacts as follows:

- The proposed timeline for implementation is fall 2013. It is an optimistic timeline. Unforeseen implementation issues may arise. The GEC suggests that fall 2014 implementation may be a more realistic goal.
- The GEC concurs with the Task Force’s conclusion that the General Education Committee is not structured to handle the implementation, ongoing maintenance, and long-term oversight and assessment of the WKU Colonnade Program. In accordance with the Task Force’s recommendation, the GEC will recommend that the Senate Executive Committee form a WKU Colonnade Program Implementation Committee (“Implementation Committee”) to facilitate the implementation of the new Program and oversee an orderly transition from the old program to the new. The SEC, in consultation with the Provost's office, should select the committee’s membership and develop for it a mission statement, WKU Colonnade Program implementation and oversight procedures,

and operating guidelines. Ideally, Implementation Committee should become the new general education review body that is proposed as part of the University's ongoing review/restructuring of faculty governance structures. It should be emphasized that it will be impossible for any governance body to predict and prescribe precisely how the implementation of and transition to the proposed Program will play out.

- Since the WKU Colonnade Program proposes new learning outcomes for all general education courses, the GEC will recommend that all currently-approved general education courses, including those that are specified by name in the proposed Program, should be decertified from automatic inclusion in the WKU Colonnade Program. The Implementation Committee should devise a process, criteria, and timeline for evaluating courses for inclusion in the new program. All new courses proposed for inclusion in the WKU Colonnade Program should be approved by the appropriate curriculum process (by department and college curriculum committees and the UCC) before being sent to the Implementation Committee for review.
- The Task Force report and faculty members express concerns about the quality and effectiveness of assessment in the current and future general education program. The GEC shares these concerns. The GEC concurs with the Task Force recommendation that the Implementation Committee should be charged with developing a rigorous, regular, and systematic assessment program for the WKU Colonnade Program. The assessment plan should be sustainable, effective, and conform to SACS recommendations. The assessment plan should include program-level and course-level assessment.
- Faculty members at the campus forums and in other feedback expressed concerns that the University will not offer enough "Connections" courses to meet student demand. While it is true that the transition from the current General Education plan to the new core curriculum may cause temporary staffing stresses, the GEC does not believe that staffing will be a long-term problem. The University will need to provide adequate resources and training to departments so that they can meet student demand for core curriculum coursework, including but not limited to "Connections" courses.

11. Faculty members express concern that the faculty will not have enough resources and training to implement the new Program successfully. The GEC shares these concerns and urges the University to provide adequate staffing, funding and training, as recommended by the Task Force report.

12. Faculty and administrators have many questions about how the WKU Colonnade Program will impact the professional lives of faculty at the University's regional campuses. The GEC is concerned that faculty at regional campuses may face increasing demands on their time and recommend that they receive additional support, training, and development funding to facilitate implementation of the WKU Colonnade Program. Furthermore, the GEC urges that the university's regional campuses be taken into consideration if new faculty lines are created to meet the demands of the adopted WKU Colonnade Program.