

INFORMATION ITEM: ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ACCREDITATION

Item: Preliminary Recommendations of the General Education Review Taskforce

As part of its ongoing consideration of how Connecticut's colleges and universities can deliver the best undergraduate education possible to our students, especially given an increasingly competitive national and global environment, the Board of Governors for Higher Education is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that Connecticut's quality standards continue to reflect the highest educational standards while serving the best interests of our students, our colleges and universities, and our society more generally.

The Board of Governors charged the Department of Higher Education to begin a review of those quality standards, which are used to license and accredit institutions and degree programs. The Department began that review by first focusing on the Board's standard on general education. The materials we provide here reflect the work, begun in September, of the statewide General Education Review Taskforce, whose membership is listed below.

The Taskforce was convened by Commissioner Lewis in September and given the following charge:

To assist the Department of Higher Education in reviewing and improving upon the Board of Governors' general education standard so that it reflects the role higher education should best fulfill in preparing students for productive economic lives and for responsible civic lives as we together shape the future of our workplaces, our communities, our state and our nation.

The Commissioner asked the Taskforce to report the results of its work to her by April 2004 so that she could present its recommendations to the Board of Governors for consideration by May 2004.

This informational report provides an overview of the direction in which the Taskforce believes the Board's quality standard on general education should move. The Taskforce believes that the Statement of Principles and General Education Recommendations – both attached – will result in a more relevant and substantive Board standard.

The Work of the Taskforce

The Taskforce began its work with the fundamental discussion about what constitutes a meaningful core of general education and liberal arts offerings, what common academic experience students should have regardless of major, and what the balance between liberal and professional education might at its ideal best be. The Taskforce understood that while preparation for a career is obviously important and while a college education

plays a key role in that preparation, it is also clear that men and women will have many jobs and careers in their lives, not only one for which they narrowly prepare when they are 18 or 20, and that a general education helps students make such career changes and to be flexible in a world in which the only constant is continuing change. The Taskforce was concerned that core general education offerings in the state sometimes appear to lack meaning and purpose, resulting in a lack of coherence, integration and structure. The Taskforce also believed that core requirements of general education are fragmented and often lack common elements or unifying integrative themes. And, the Taskforce was concerned that the centrality of the liberal arts as an integral part of the undergraduate experience must be affirmed, and that students and faculty need to focus on what students have in common as inheritors of the Western tradition as well as how they accommodate differences based upon race, ethnicity and gender.

The Taskforce understood that enrollment in general education courses is a state requirement and is built into the state's regulations for licensure and accreditation of undergraduate degree programs. The Taskforce also understood that this requirement exists because the higher education community believes that the value of a college education lies not just in the capacity of institutions to provide knowledge and technical skills in a particular chosen field of study but also in their commitment to encourage civic virtues, strength of character, and ethical standards essential to pursuing honorable lives and honorable careers.

Connecticut has a distinguished national reputation for the strength of our colleges and universities, for the quality of the degrees those institutions award, and for the quality of our graduates. The Taskforce believes that Connecticut's strong general education component is at least in part responsible for that reputation.

The Taskforce met on September 29, 2003, October 27, 2003, November 17, 2003, December 8, 2003, and January 26, 2004. It also conducted its work through two subcommittees, one charged with drafting a Statement of Principles and one charged with considering how general education requirements might best be applied in two-year colleges, especially at the Associate of Applied Science degree level. And, the Taskforce exchanged many drafts and ideas via e-mail.

Taskforce Membership

Dr. Shirley M. Adams, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Charter Oak State College

Dr. Roger Brooks, Elie Wiesel Professor of Judaic Studies, Associate Dean of the Faculty
Connecticut College

Dr. Peter G. Cable, Principal Scientist, BBN Technologies

Ms. Judith Greiman, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges

Dr. Vagos Hadjimidahel, Dean, School of Engineering, Fairfield University

Dr. Anne L. Hiskes, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the General Education Oversight Committee, University of Connecticut

Dr. Susan D. Huard, Dean of Learning and Student Development, Quinebaug Valley Community College

Ms. Janet Jefford, Director of Curriculum, Development and Accreditation
Goodwin College

Dr. Mary Ellen Jukoski, President, Mitchell College

Dr. Bruce Kalk, Chairperson, History Department, Southern Connecticut State University

Ms. Lauren Weisberg Kaufman, Vice President, Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA)

Dr. Kenneth Klucznik, Associate Professor of English, Manchester Community College

Dr. Estela Lopez, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Connecticut State University System

Dr. Veronica Makowsky, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
University of Connecticut

Dr. Fred Maryanski, Senior Vice Provost, University of Connecticut

Dr. Paul Susen, Chief Academic Officer, Community-Technical College System

Dr. Thomas Tynan Associate Director, Academic Affairs, Department of Higher Education

Dr. Linda Vaden-Goad, Dean, School of Arts and Sciences, Western Connecticut State University

Dr. John Walters, Director for Evaluation & Planning, Department of Higher Education

Dr. Jonas Zdanys, Chief Academic Officer & Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs, Department of Higher Education

GENERAL EDUCATION STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

General Education programs in Connecticut should provide a foundation for undergraduate work and life-long learning. Their purpose is to provide informational substance while developing critical perspective and synthesis; to affirm human and intellectual values while liberating the imagination; and to encourage the critical examination of ideas and provide diverse perspectives necessary to such examination, for these are the processes that form the foundation for responsible citizenship and an enlightened culture and society.

General education fulfills these goals by acquainting students with basic knowledge of (a) the past and present diversity of human achievements and perspectives at the levels of individuals, groups, and cultures; (b) how scientific and mathematical inquiry understand nature and enable technological development, and thus shape people's lives by affecting the economic and material frameworks of society; (c) how the arts and humanities foster insights about the human condition and encourage aspirations for the future, and (d) how the social sciences inform us of past efforts and guide future efforts at living together in political, economic, and cultural communities.

Furthermore, general education programs help students develop the cognitive flexibility and the skills necessary to face the changes and challenges of the future, particularly the abilities (a) to express themselves clearly and fully in both speech and writing, and to work collaboratively with others, (b) to reason independently, analytically, and quantitatively, and (c) to utilize informational technology to facilitate research and learning.

These expectations provide institutions great flexibility in their approach to and design of a general education program. Institutions may serve the goals of general education through different sets of requirements and structures specific to their character and mission. Nevertheless, an institution must coherently define how its system of general education articulates these expected skills, knowledge, and abilities and how it will integrate them with one another and within the overall mission and educational philosophy of the institution. General education programs should constitute at least one-third of the undergraduate curriculum, balanced throughout the curriculum via distribution requirements or restricted electives. Institutions must assess their general education programs independently, to assure that they meet these goals separately from the purposes of the major and other elements of the undergraduate degree program.

GENERAL EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

To meet and affirm the standards and regulations of the Board of Governors for Higher Education concerning general education, the General Education Review Taskforce makes the following recommendations:

- We recommend adoption of the General Education Statement of Principles as the foundation for undergraduate education in Connecticut.
- We recommend that each college and university in Connecticut have in place, and specify, its process for developing, implementing, and nurturing its general education program.
- We recommend that the general education component of an undergraduate degree program be consistent with each institution's mission and with the general education requirements of the Board of Governors for Higher Education.
- We recommend that, while there are and ought to be varying approaches to general education, grounded in institutional mission, Connecticut's colleges and universities strive for coherence of general education coursework, integration of general education courses into the entire undergraduate program, and for measurable learning outcomes, both for the major and for general education within the degree program.
- We recommend that each college and university develop a plan for the periodic review and improvement of its general education requirement, so that feedback is provided on how well the institution is meeting its goals and objectives for general education.
- We recommend that the Board of Governors' quality standard for general education continue to require that general education constitute at least one-third of all associate and baccalaureate degree programs in Connecticut.
- We recommend that the Board of Governors' quality standard for general education be amended, as appropriate, to incorporate these recommendations and the expectations of the General Education Statement of Principles.